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あしたのジョー13
KC
原作／高森朝雄
漫画／ちばてつや
講談社
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★★★★★★★

野性のジョーか、戦慄のカーロスか？　執念の炎を燃やし、後楽園特設リングにくりひろげる血みどろの激闘！　高森・ちばの黄金コンビが贈る、感動のスポーツ巨編堂々の第十三弾！

★★★★★★★

オリジナルデザイン／水野石文
（水野プロダクション）

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13

あしたのジョー

Written by Asao Takamori (Kajiwara Ikki)
Drawn by Chiba Tetsuya

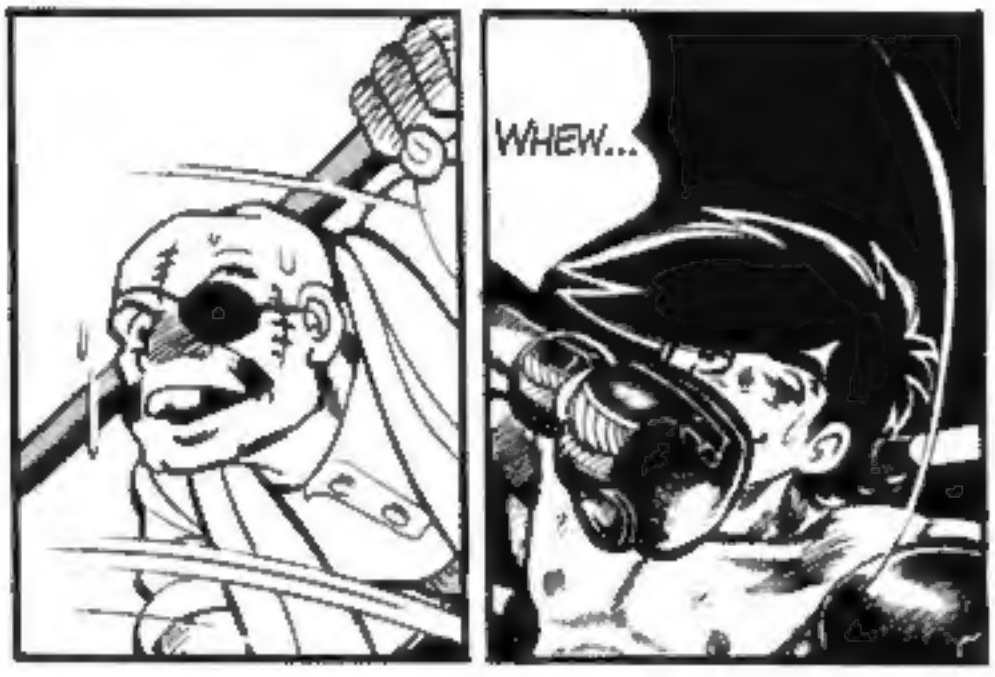
矢吹丈は、〝殺し屋〟の異名をもつ強打のボクサーだったが、宿敵の力石徹をリングに死なせたショックから得意の必殺パンチを失い、ドサまわりのボクサーにおちぶれていた。

おりから南米ベネズエラから、世界六位の強豪カーロス・リベラが来日し、かつて丈が対戦した南郷選手や原島選手と対戦したが、丈はその試合にかくされたリベラの恐るべき底力を見抜き、異常な闘志をかきたてられ、白木ジム会長の白木葉子を通じてリベラとの対戦を申し入れた。

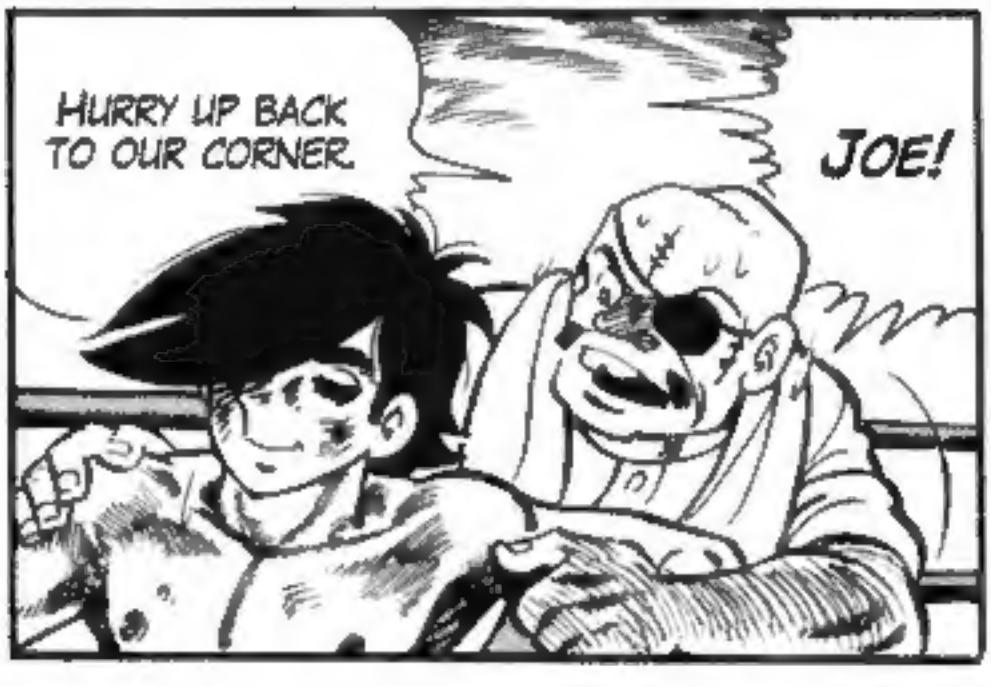
やがて迎えたカーロス・リベラ対矢吹丈との特別試合の四回戦。いまや完全に〝野性の男〟によみがえった丈は、〝戦慄の男〟リベラに、猛烈な闘志で立ちむかったのだった……。

★前巻までのあらすじ★

ナナ!


WHEW...

ガガガ
ガ


HURRY UP BACK TO OUR CORNER
JOE!

I THINK I'VE OVERESTIMATED THIS JOE YABUKI FELLA, ROBERT.

HE'S GOTTEN IT INTO HIS MIND THAT STICKING TO THE ROPES IS THE SAFEST PLACE FOR HIM, ALL JUST BECAUSE HE HAPPENED TO SCORE ONE GOOD HIT FROM THERE DURING OUR SPARRING SESSION.

IT SEEMS HE CAN'T EVEN REALIZE SOMETHING THAT EVEN THE FANS OUT HERE CAN PLAINLY SEE.

LOOKS LIKE I'VE BEEN OVERESTIMATING HIM TOO.

HE COULDN'T BE MORE WRONG IF HE THINKS YOU'LL JUST COME AT HIM WITH A STRAIGHT IF KEEPS WAITING BY THE ROPES.

MY FEELINGS EXACTLY.

HAHA...

BUT DO YOU KNOW WHY?

CARLOS LAUGHED JUST BEFORE THE BELL RANG,

I CAN'T TELL AT ALL WHAT HE'S PLANNING...

BUT IT WAS A REAL EERIE LAUGH.

NO, NOT AT ALL...

NORIKO, HAND ME THE VASELIN AND WATER BOTTLE.

LOOSEN YOUR SHOULDERS!

H-HERE...

WHAT...?

HAS FINALLY BEEN CAUGHT BY THE TRAP I LAID...

IT MEANS THAT THE WILD BEAST WITH UNMEASURABLE POTENTIAL,

THERE'S NOTHING TO BE THAT AFRAID OF.

ARE YOU SAYING YOU CAN PULL OUT THE CARD YOU USED AGAINST ME LAST NIGHT?

SO THEN...

THAT I'M WAITING FOR HIS STRAIGHT ALONG THE ROPES.

CARLOS PROBABLY THINKS,

NOW THAT WE KNOW HOW GOOD OF A FIGHTER HE REALLY IS, THERE'S NO NEED TO DRAG THIS FIGHT OUT ANY LONGER, CARLOS...

SEE WHAT HAPPENS TO A BEAST CAUGHT IN A TRAP.

JUST KEEP QUIET AND WATCH.

C'MON THEN. SECONDS OUT OF THE RING!

MAKE THIS ROUND THE FINAL ROUND!

GO FOR AN UPPERCUT OR SWING MIXED WITH AN ELBOW TO FINISH HIM OFF IN ONE BLOW!

YOU GOT IT.

HEH.

ズーン

COME AT ME, THEN.

AND SO THE BEAST CHARGES IN HEAD FIRST...

ゴッ

WHAT THE HELL DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING!?

IT SEEMS LIKE HIS BOXING SENSE HAS PICKED UP QUITE A FEW BAD HABITS FROM HIS RECENT TIME FIGHTING ON BACK-ALLEY BOXING RINGS.

AHHHH! AS SOON AS THE ROUND STARTED, YABUKI HAS HEADED FOR THE ROPES STRAIGHT AWAY AGAIN!

EVEN FOR AN EXHIBITION MATCH, THIS IS A COMPLETE RIP-OFF!

YOU THINK IT'S ALL GOOD AS LONG AS YOU CAN DRAG OUT THE MATCH SINCE YOU'VE ALREADY GOTTEN YOUR FIGHT MONEY!?

DON'T YELL AT ME.

I SAID FIGHT, YABUKI!

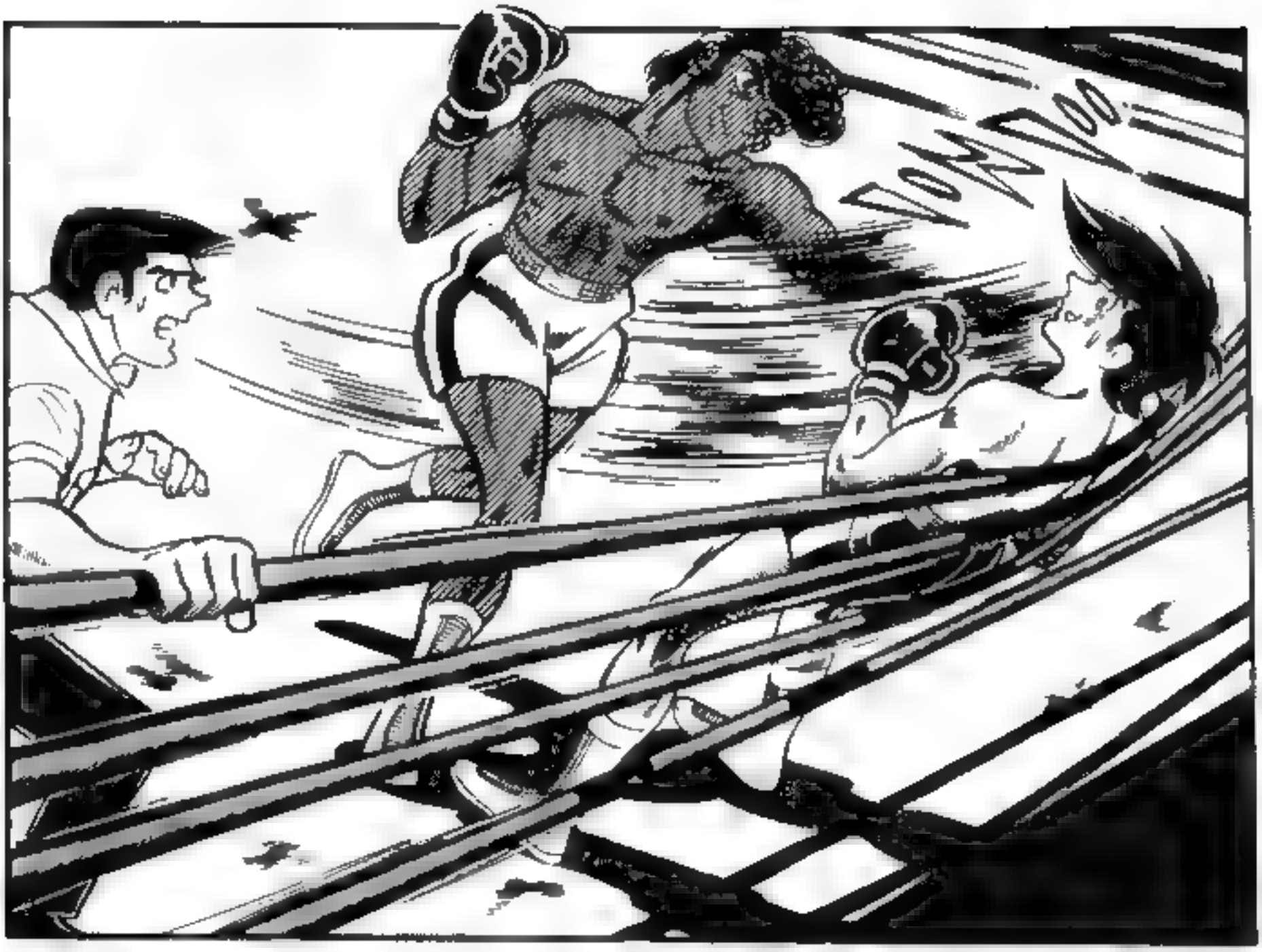
F-FIGHT!

HERE I AM, TRYING TO PUT ON A SPECIAL SHOW FOR THESE AMATEURS AND YET THEY'RE ALL YELLING.

OWW!

NOW!

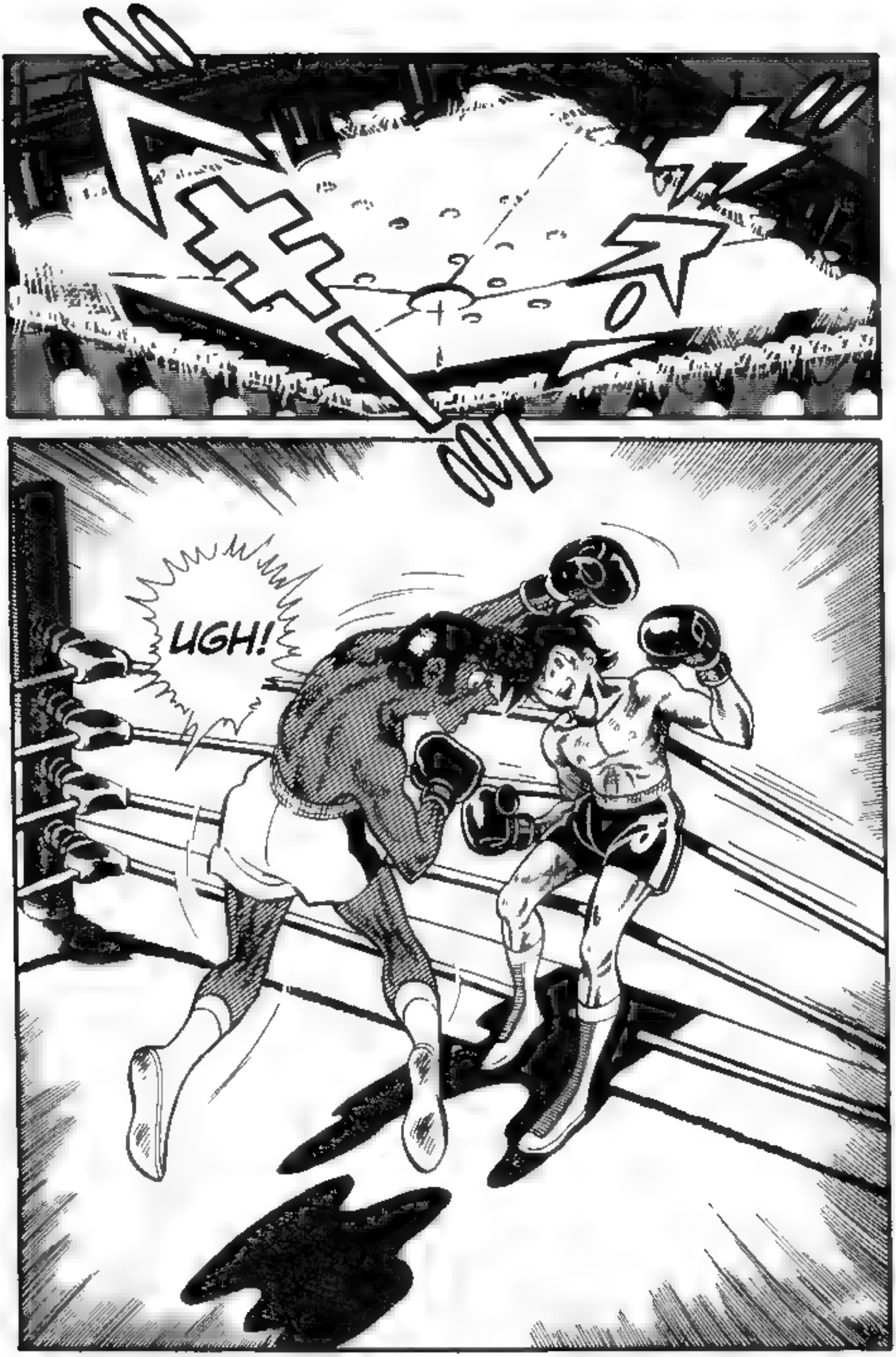
CARLOS!


DOOOOO

AGH-

....

A SWING THAT CAN'T BE CROSS-COUNTERED!
THIS SHOULD DO IT!
10


UGH!

AH...

A-

WHAAA...

HEH

HEH

.....

BACK TO YOUR CORNER!

B-BACK...

R-RIVERA IS DOWN!

I REPEAT, IT IS RIVERA WHO HAS FALLEN DOWN THIS TIME!

3!

2!

00

DOWN

11

THE UNCROWNED EMPEROR!

THE TERROR OF VENEZUELA, CARLOS RIVERA...

THE 6TH WORLD-RANKED BOXER!

IS LYING DOWN IN AGONY IN THIS EXHIBITION MATCH AFTER A BLOW FROM YABUKI JOE!

Y-YOU DID IT, JOE...

LOOKS LIKE I PULLED IT OFF.

I...
I DON'T KNOW...
I HAVEN'T GOT THE FAINTEST IDEA...

CARLOS WAS THE ONE WHO HAD JOE CORNERED.
CARLOS WAS THE ONE WHO STARTED SWINGING FIRST.
SO WHY'S HE ON THE GROUND?

W-WHAT HAPPENED JUST NOW?

4!

5!

6!

WHEW...

7!

ゴ"ッ"

REST UNTIL THE REF COUNTS TO 9!

LIE DOWN, CARLOS!

8!

HEY, LOOK.

CARLOS IS SMILING BEING KNOCKED ON HIS ASS.

ゴ"ク"リ

MAN, WHAT IS IT WITH BOTH FIGHTERS...
I CAN'T UNDERSTAND THEM AT ALL.

HIS LEGS SEEM A LITTLE SLOW AT THE MOMENT...

CARLOS STANDS UP AND THE FIGHT RESUMES!

AT THE COUNT OF NINE,

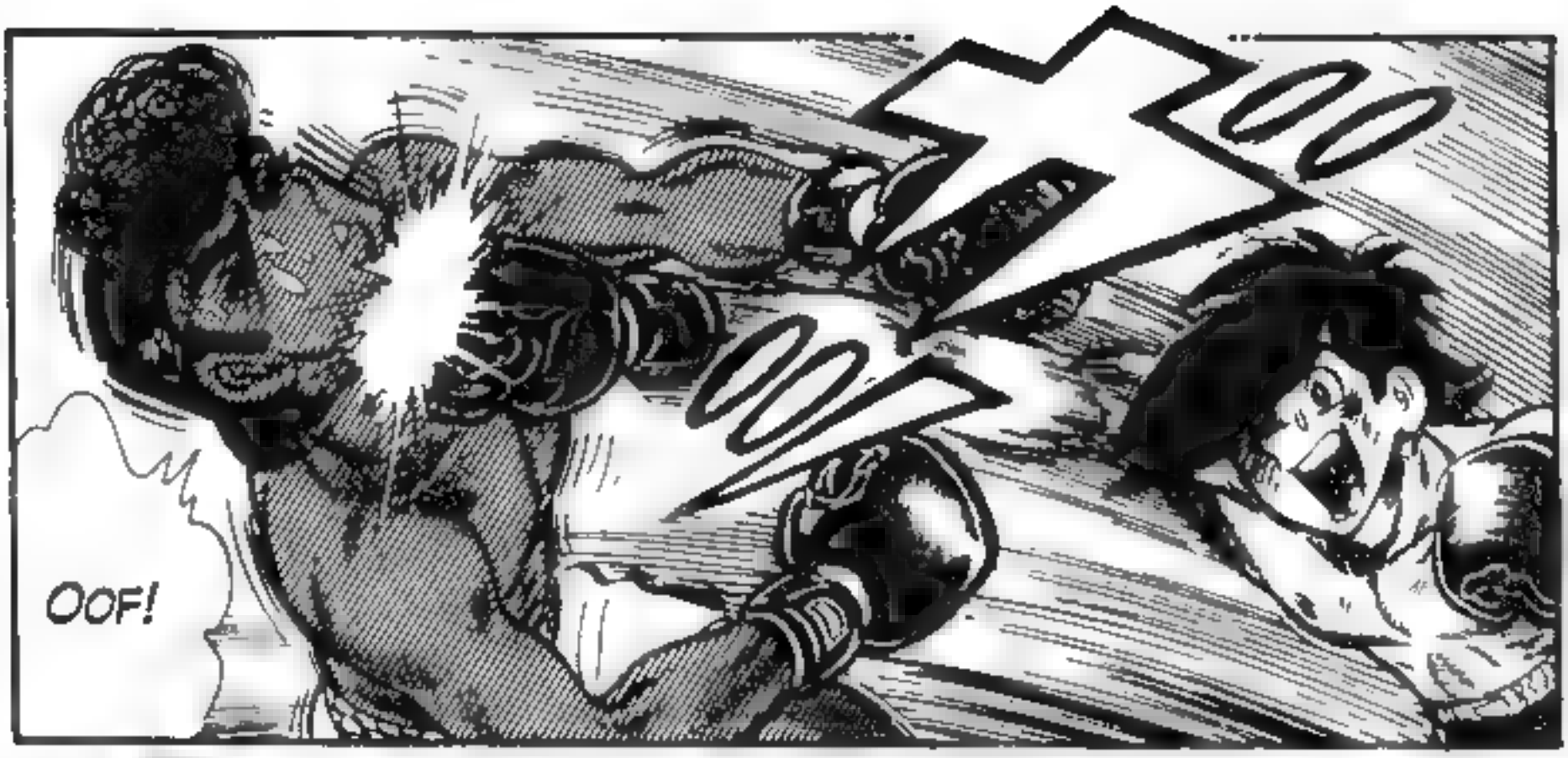
9!

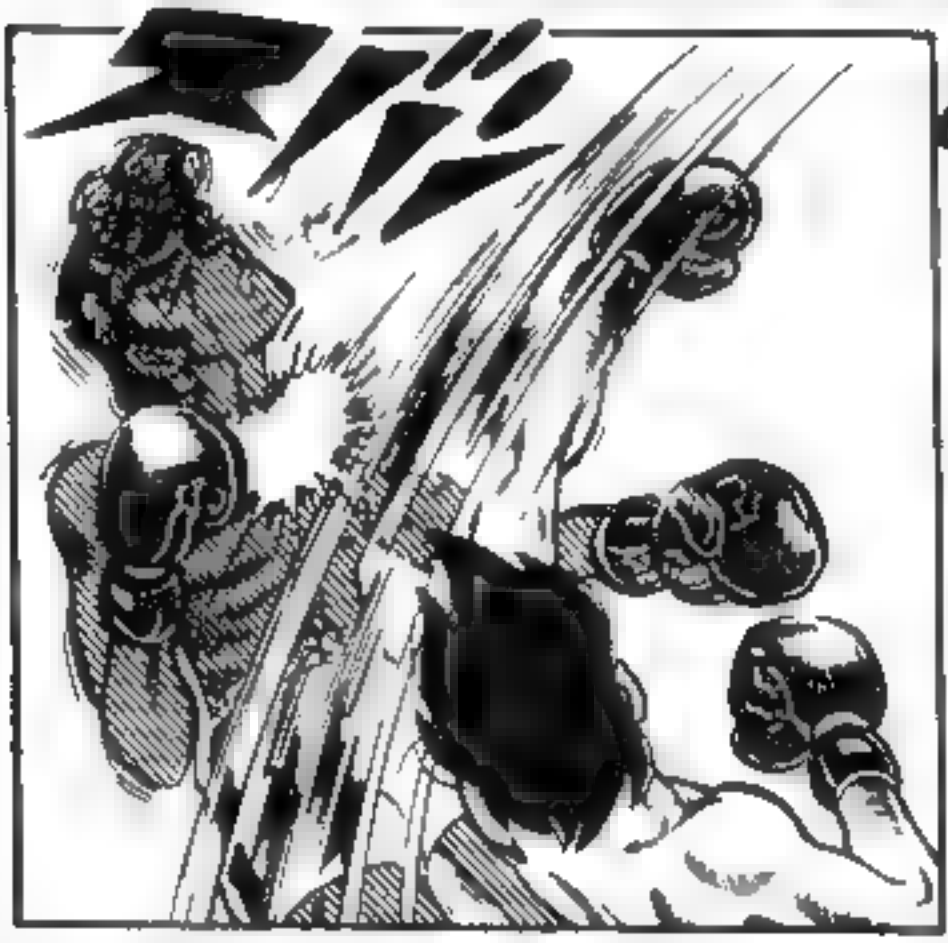
HAHA.

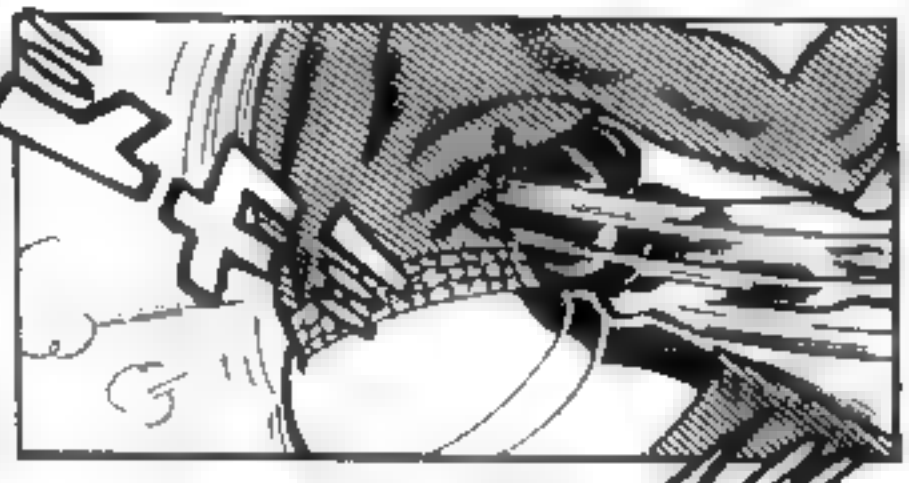
RESUME FIGHT!

GOOD, GOOD. EVEN IF MY PUNCH WAS PRETTY STRONG, THIS FIGHT'D BE MIGHTY DISAPPOINTING IF YOU DIDN'T COME RIGHT BACK AT ME WITH A SMILE!

IT'S THE FACT THAT WE CAN BOTH LAUGH OFF EACH OTHER'S PUNCHES THAT MAKES THIS FIGHT WORTH FIGHTING!


OOF!





NOT SO FAST...
UGH!

HE'S TAKING BLOW AFTER BLOW! WHAT A PUNISHING RUSH BY YABUKI!

JUST WHEN WE THOUGHT CARLOS GOING DOWN WAS AN UNIMAGINABLE SCENARIO, HERE HE IS, BEING PUSHED BACK TO THE ROPES WHILE PUMMELED BY YABUKI JOE!

I SAID STOP, YABUKI!

S-STOP!

ARE YOU ALRIGHT, CARLOS!?

CARLOS!

CONSIDER THAT PAYBACK FOR ROUND 1.

HAHA, DID YA LIKE THAT?

WELL, I... TO BE FRANK, I'M NOT SURE MYSELF EITHER.

HOW ON EARTH DID THAT LEAD TO A DRAMATIC REVERSAL, WITH RIVERA SUFFERING HIS FIRST DOWN...?

THE KILLER SWING FROM RIVERA IN THIS ROUND THAT EVERYBODY PREDICTED WOULD LAND ON THE CORNERED-YABUKI...

B-BY THE WAY,

THE WHOLE SITUATION SEEMED TO SPELL OUT CERTAIN DOOM FOR YABUKI BACK THEN...

AND A WEAVING ATTEMPT SEEMS IMPOSSIBLE CONSIDERING THE CARLOS' APPROACH-IN.

NOR COULD YABUKI DODGE IT WITH A SWAYBACK SINCE HE HAD HIS BACK UP AGAINST THE ROPES.

FROM WHAT I CAN REMEMBER, THAT SWING LOOKED FAR TOO POWERFUL TO BE BLOCKED...

LOOK! IT'S THE SLOW-MO!

AHH!

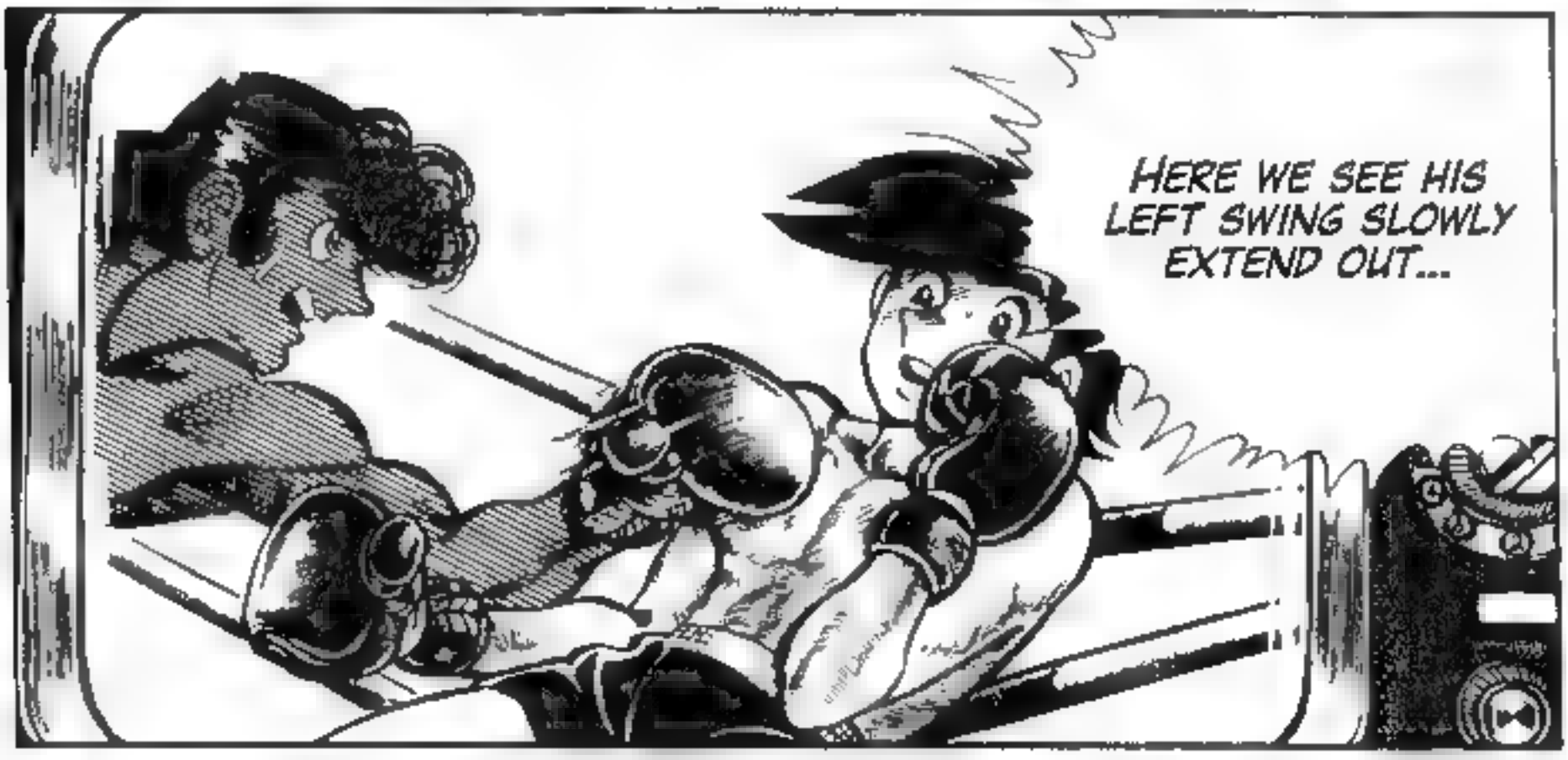
AH, HOLD ON A MOMENT! HERE'S THE PRECISE MOMENT IN SLOW-MOTION REPLAY!

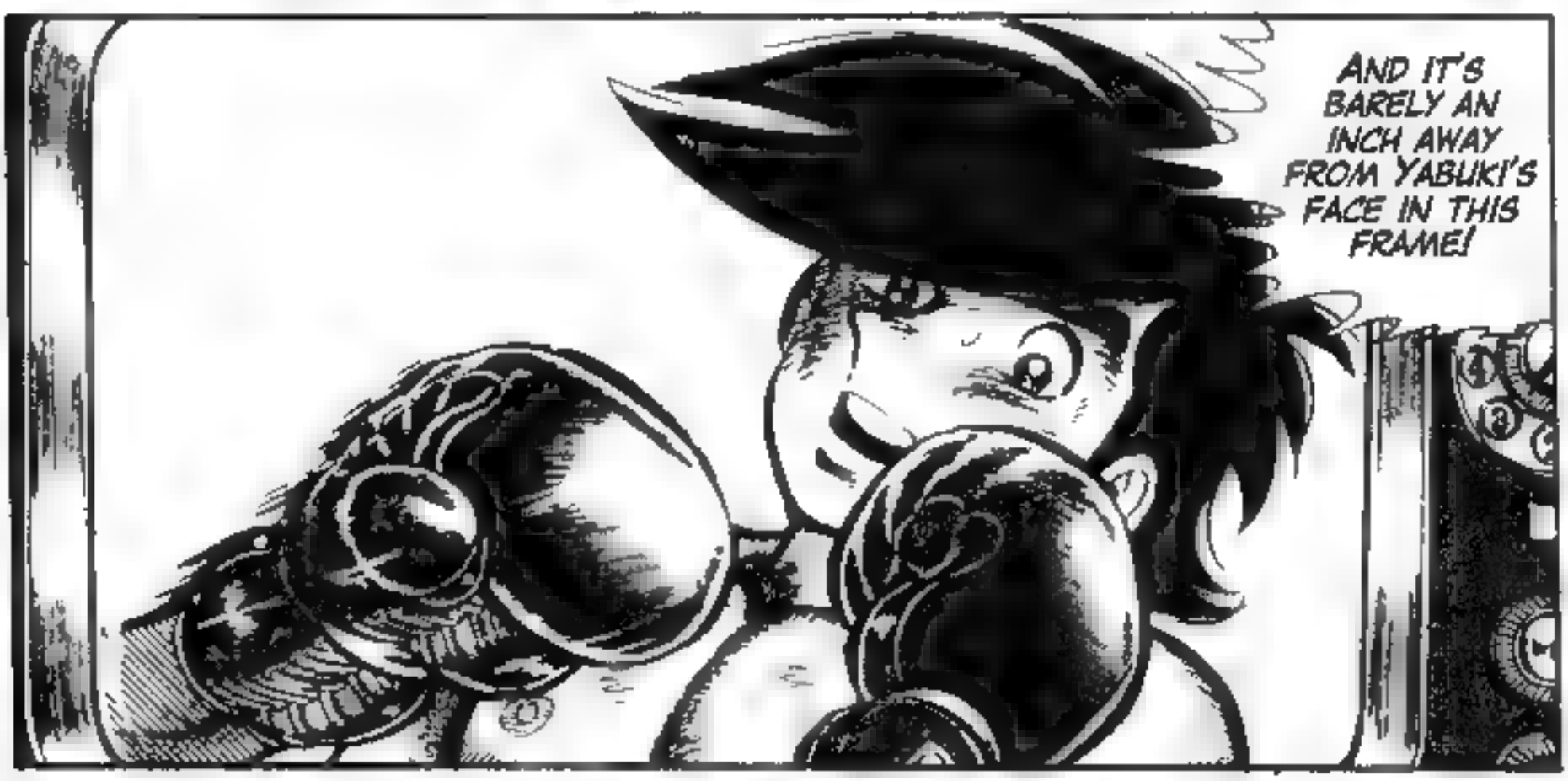
LET ME SEE!

HERE'S THE REPLAY FROM THE MOMENT WHEN RIVERA LEANS IN WITH A HUGE SWING...

HE SEEMS TO BE AIMING FOR YABUKI'S FACE!

AND, OHHHH!


HERE WE SEE HIS LEFT SWING SLOWLY EXTEND OUT...


AND IT'S BARELY AN INCH AWAY FROM YABUKI'S FACE IN THIS FRAME!

AHH, HERE IT IS!

UP TO THIS POINT, IT DOESN'T SEEM LIKE A PUNCH THAT'S AT ALL ABLE TO BE SIMPLY BLOCKED BY YABUKI JOE.

IT'S A TREMENDOUSLY POWERFUL SWING THAT RIVERA HAS PUT ALL HIS WEIGHT BEHIND.

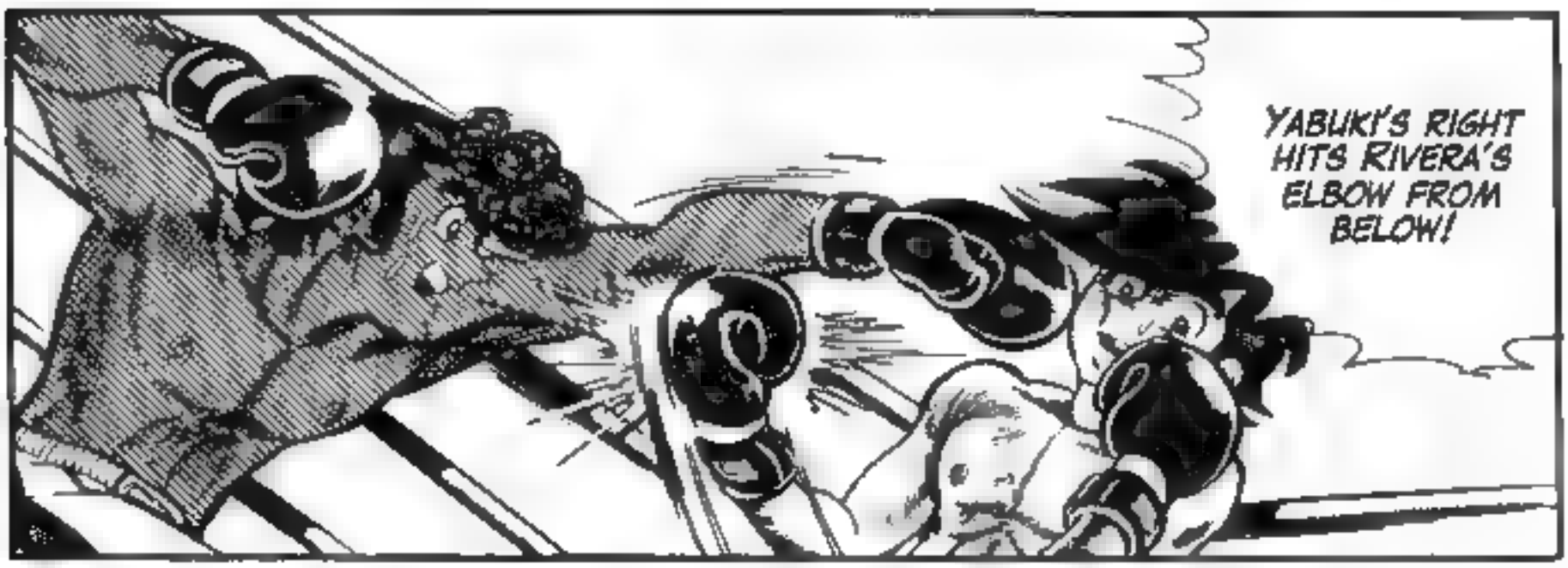
THE PRECISE FRAME AS RIVERA'S JUST ABOUT TO MAKE CONTACT WITH JOE'S FACE!

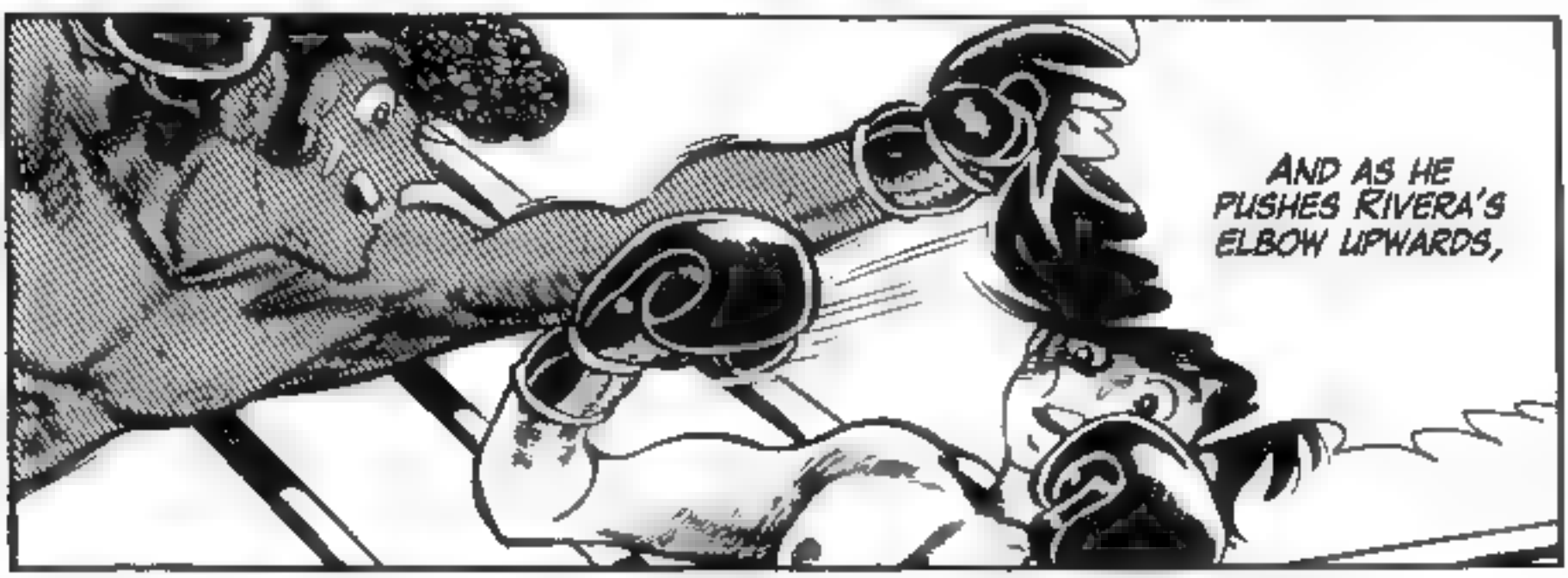
AHH, YOU'RE RIGHT!

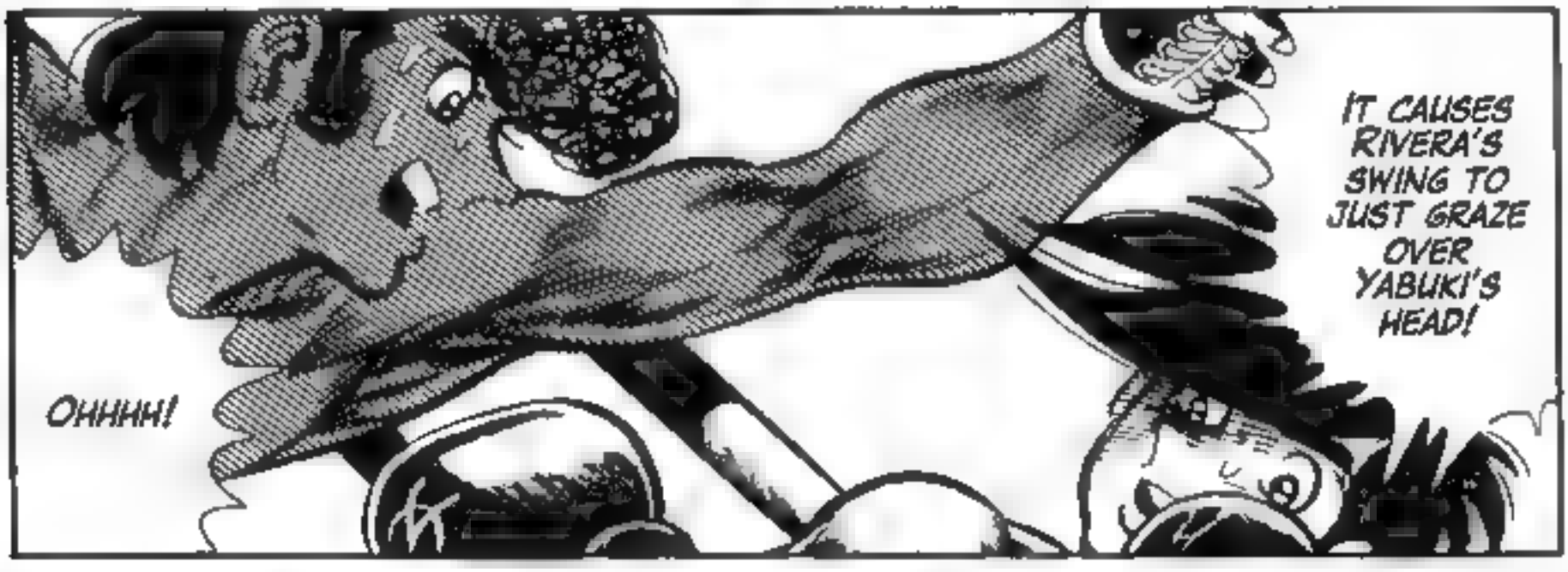
AH, LOOK!

IT APPEARS YABUKI'S RIGHT IS FOLLOWING UP TO MEET UP WITH RIVERA'S SWING AS IT EXTENDS OUT...

LOOK!

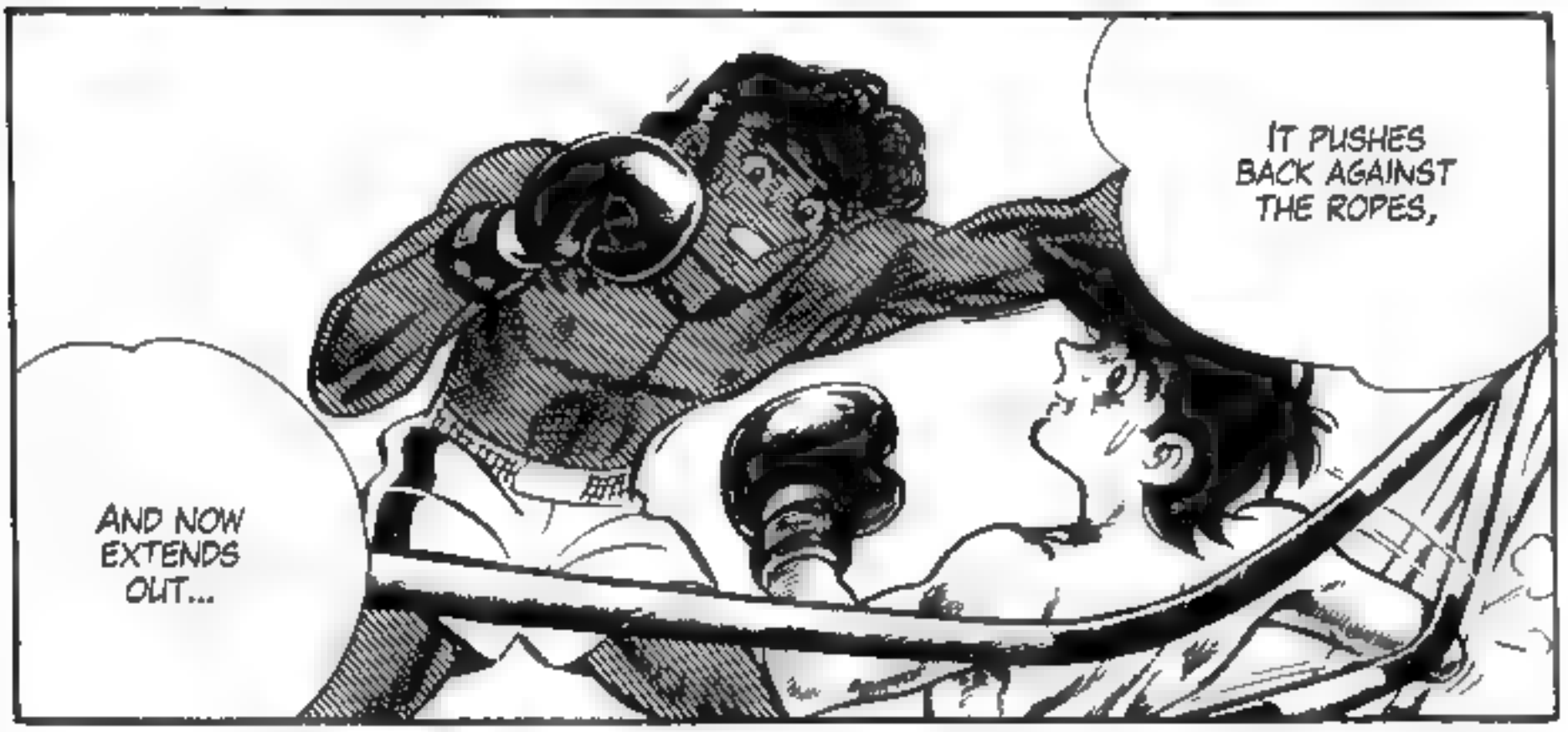

YABUKI'S RIGHT HITS RIVERA'S ELBOW FROM BELOW!

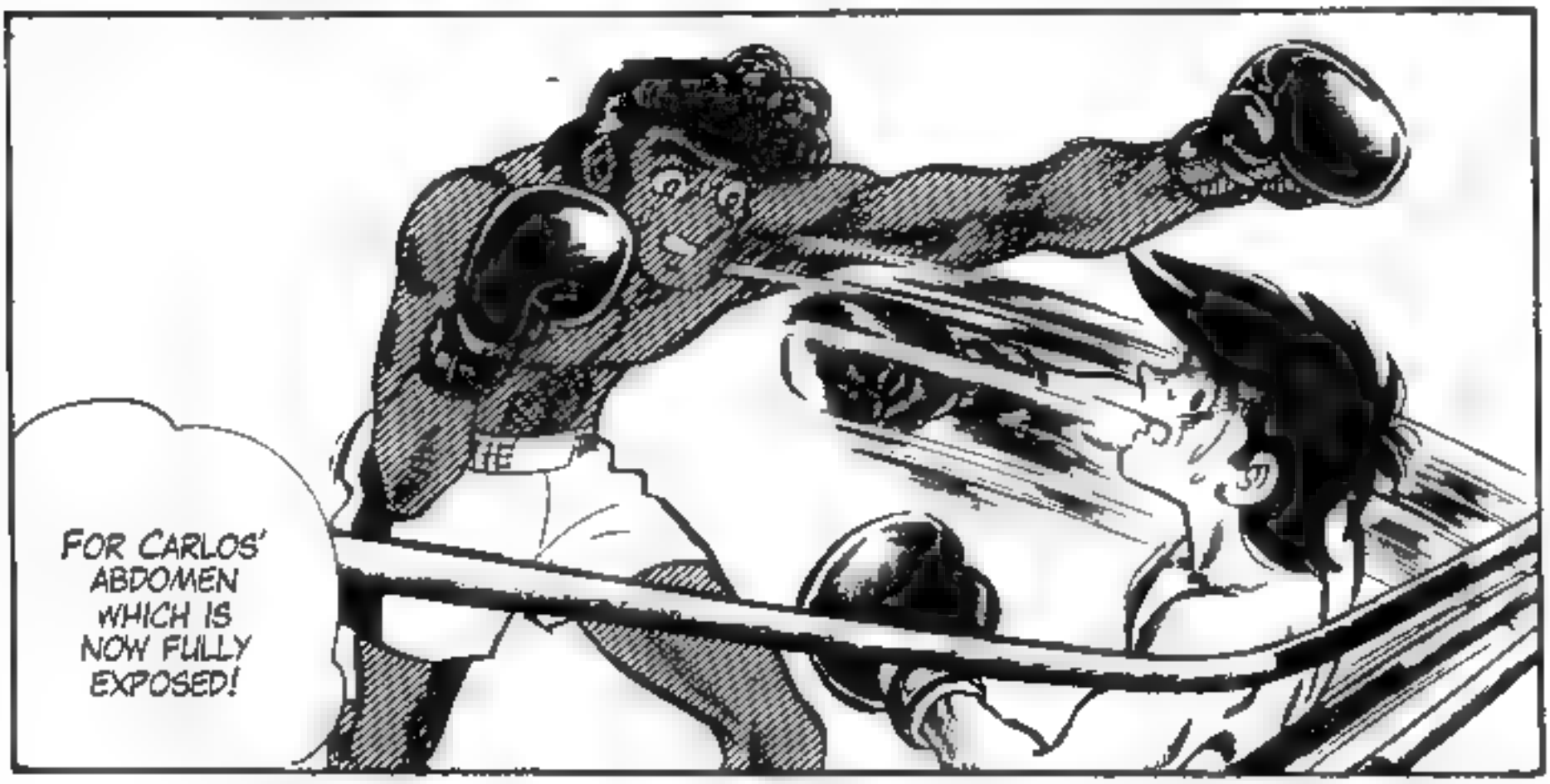

AND AS HE PUSHES RIVERA'S ELBOW UPWARDS,

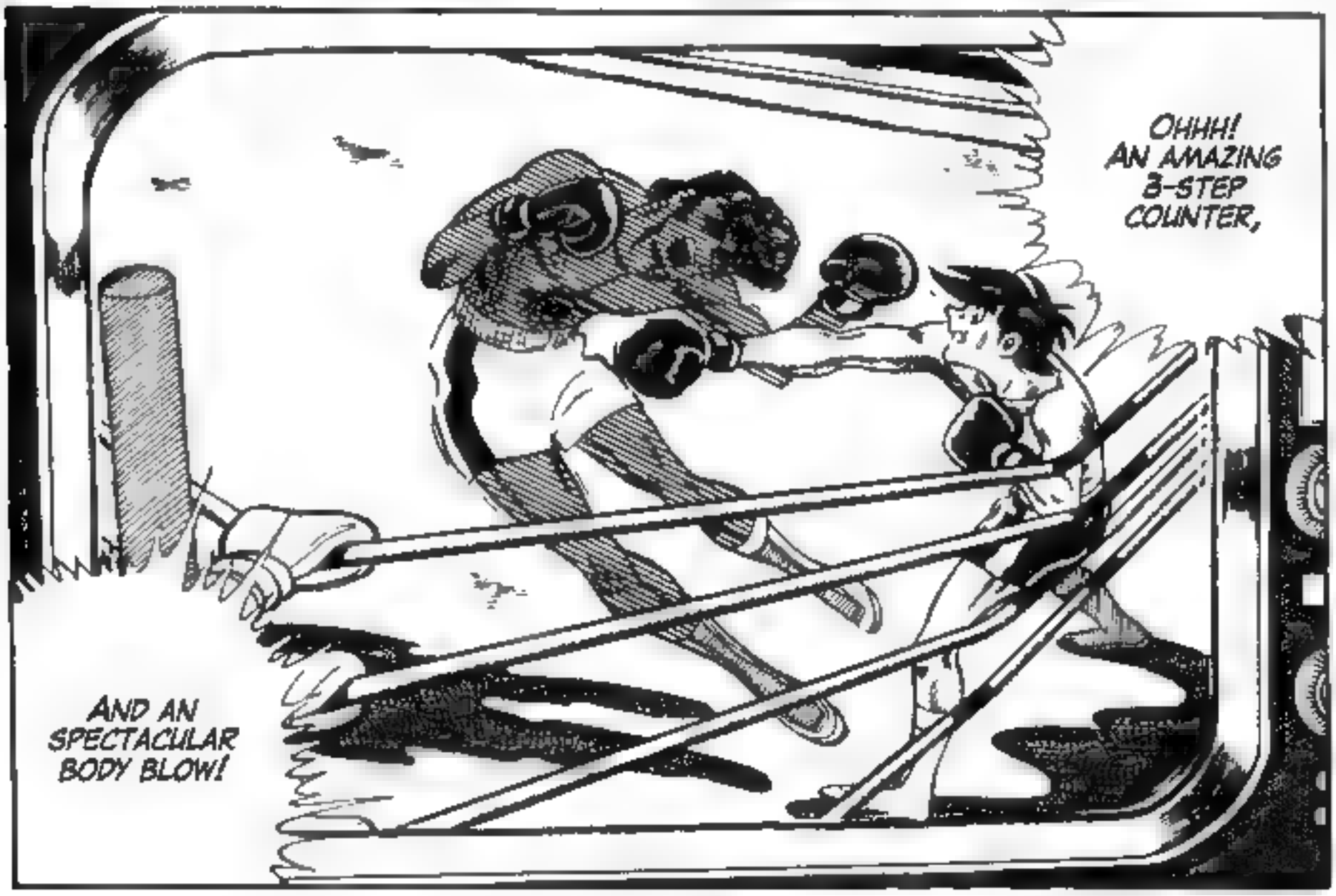

IT CAUSES RIVERA'S SWING TO JUST GRAZE OVER YABUKI'S HEAD!
OHHHH!

AMAZING!
AND LOOK, RIVERA'S NOW OFF BALANCE!

TAKE A LOOK AT YABUKI'S RIGHT.
M-MORE IMPORTANTLY,
NOT SURPRISING SINCE RIVERA MISSED WITH HIS SWING THAT HE PUT ALL HIS WEIGHT BEHIND.


IT PUSHES BACK AGAINST THE ROPES,
AND NOW EXTENDS OUT...


FOR CARLOS' ABDOMEN WHICH IS NOW FULLY EXPOSED!


OHHH! AN AMAZING 3-STEP COUNTER,
AND AN SPECTACULAR BODY BLOW!

WHOA.
THAT'S INSANE... I'VE NEVER SEEN A BODY BLOW ACTUALLY SEND A MAN OFF HIS FEET.
ALTHOUGH IT WAS HARD TO TELL WHAT HAPPENED WATCHING IT LIVE, THIS SLOW-MOTION REPLAY HAS REVEALED THE TRUE REASON WHY RIVERA WAS DOWNED DURING THAT LAST ROUND.

IT SEEMS THE BEAST STILL LIVES ON WITHIN YABUKI!

KILLER JOE'S INSTINCTS DON'T SEEM TO HAVE DULLED AT ALL!

STOP LOOKING AT THE STANDS!

HEH HEH.

WE REALLY SHOULD HAVE GONE WITH OUR ORIGINAL GUT FEELINGS...

WELL, CARLOS... I KNOW IT'S TOO LATE NOW, BUT...

I'VE NEVER FELT SUCH ADRENALINE AND EMOTIONS STIRRING UP WITHIN ME, READY TO EXPLODE.

BUT DESPITE MY MISTAKE THAT ROUND, I'M ACTUALLY SOMEWHAT PLEASED.

YES...

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO DO THAT?

BUT...

AN OPPONENT THAT I CAN GO ALL-OUT ON BY USING EVERY LAST ONE OF MY TECHNIQUES WITHOUT ANY OTHER CONCERN THAN TO BE THE ONE LAST MAN STANDING.

I FINALLY FOUND HIM, ROBERT!

AS YOU PERSONALLY EXPERIENCED JUST NOW, HIS ROPE-TACTICS CAN NULLIFY EVEN YOUR ONE-TWO PUNCH WITH AN ELBOW...!

I THINK IT'S BETTER NOT TO SET UP ANY STRATEGIES LIKE THAT AGAINST JOE YABUKI.

I'D SAY THE BEST APPROACH IS TO DRAG HIM OUT OF THE CORNER WITH THE CLINCH,

AND FOLLOW UP WITH AN ELBOW SMASH...

NO...

HAHA... AFTER FINALLY FINDING AN OPPONENT WORTH FIGHTING, I DON'T WANT TO RESORT TO PETTY TACTICS LIKE THAT, ROBERT.

ALL I HAVE TO DO,

IS JUST EXCHANGE BLOWS WITH HIM TO MY HEART'S CONTENT!

I'LL TRUST IN YOUR SKILL.

FINE.

THAT'S ALL..

I JUST WANT TO FACE HIM HEAD-ON WITH ALL MY STRENGTH, PLAIN AND SIMPLE.

ALRIGHT, ROBERT?

STICK TO THE ROPES AND BAIT OUT ANOTHER OPENING!

IT'S TOO DANGEROUS TO RISK ANOTHER SLUGFEST!

JOE! RIVERA PROBABLY ALREADY RECOVERED FROM THE EARLIER DOWN DURING THE BREAK JUST NOW.

HAHA...

WERE MY PUNCHES REALLY THAT LIGHT FOR YOU TO RECOVER IN JUST ONE MINUTE...?

WHADDYA SAY, CARLOS? WELL?

6TH RANKED BOXER IN THE WORLD!

WELL? ANSWER ME, YOU...

THE UNCROWNED EMPEROR!

MR. VENEZUELA'S TERROR!

A-AND THERE YABUKI GOES AGAIN! THE FIRE'S CLEARLY LIT UNDER HIM AS HE LAUNCHES INTO ANOTHER PUNISHING RUSH!

CARLOS IS IN TROUBLE! HIS GUARD CAN BARELY HOLD UP!

NGHH...

BACK AWAY!

DON'T GET CARRIED AWAY!

S- STOP IT, JOE!

OH SHI-

AHHH!

WHY YOU...

WHOA-

DAMN IT!

UGH!

SON OF A...!

AGHHHH!

ズギ!
ドン

THE CROWD HAS EXPLODED IN RESPONSE!
RIGHT IN THE CENTER OF THE RING!
THIS IS BECOMING A FULL BLOWN SLUGFEST,
THIS IS NO LONGER A SIMPLE EXHIBITION MATCH! THIS IS THE 4-ROUNDER MATCH OF THE CENTURY!

ワーワー

AHH...

J-
JOE...

...

AH-

CAN'T YOU HEAR ME!?

I SAID STOP!

W-WAIT!

STOP!

W-WHAT THE HELL IS THAT RETARDED REF DOING!?

I'LL KILL THAT FRICKIN' REF!

WHY DID HE STOP THEM JUST WHEN THE ACTION WAS GETTIN' GOOD!?

AGHHHH!

HUH?

I SAID GO BACK TO YOUR CORNERS!

B-BACK TO YOUR NEUTRAL CORNER!

AHHH!

AHHHH!

JOEEE!

AGHHH!

ズ"

GAHH!

THAT WAS A PRETTY DAMN GOOD COPY OF MY SPECIALTY...

JOE YABUKI...

HAHA...

THE HIDDEN ELBOW SMASH...

AGHH!

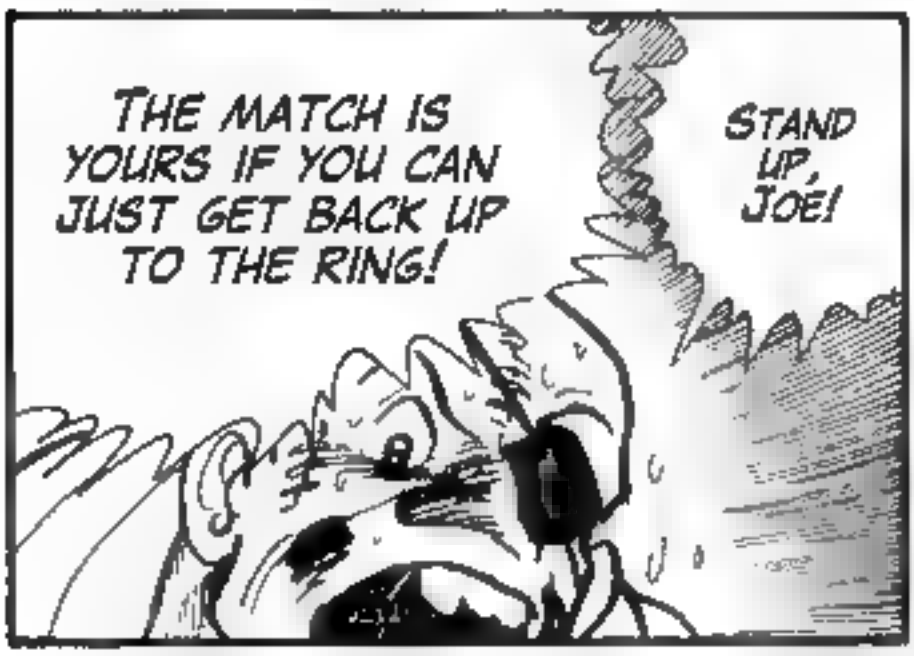
ONE'S DOWN ON THE RING, THE OTHER'S DOWN ON THE FLOOR!

O-OHHH! IT'S A DOUBLE KNOCKDOWN!

SBC

JOEEEE!
MOVE ASIDE!
J-JOE!

J-JOE...
.....
2!
1!


THE MATCH IS YOURS IF YOU CAN JUST GET BACK UP TO THE RING!
STAND UP, JOE!

3!

4!

YEOW...

S-STOP YELLING SO LOUD...

SO COME ON! STAND UP! PLEASE!

F... FIVE!

H-HE'S SLOWLY STANDING UP!

AHH, IT LOOKS LIKE RIVERA'S REGAINED CONSCIOUSNESS.

Y-YES THAT'S IT, JOE!

YABUKI IS ALSO TRYING DESPERATELY TO GET BACK UP ON HIS FEET!

NOW GET BACK ON THE RING!

NGHH...

フラ〃

6!

C-CARLOS IS BACK UP!

7!

YOU CAN DO IT, JOE!

GET A GOOD GRIP ON THE ROPES!

COME ON, YOU'RE ALMOST THERE!

HEH HEH...

YES, JUST A LITTLE MORE...

HEH HEH...

9!

K"

YOU'RE JUST ABOUT THERE!

HUH?

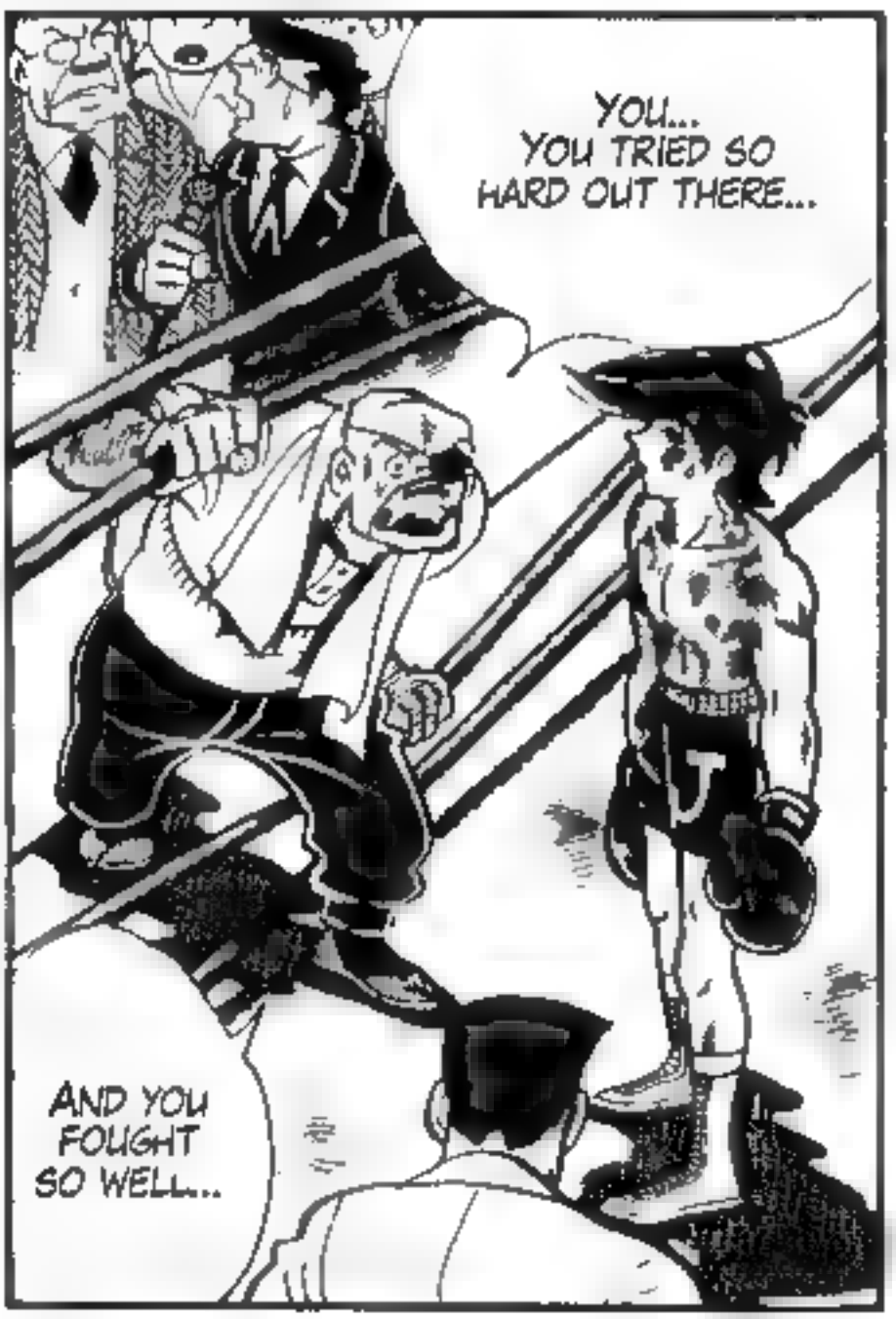
WHA...?

Y-YABUKI JOE IS DISQUALIFIED!

AS A MANAGER, I'M SURE YOU'RE WELL AWARE OF THE RULE WHICH FORBIDS A SECOND TO ASSIST A BOXER IN GETTING BACK UP ON THE RING!
TANGE DANPEI!
AH-
AHHH...

W-WHAT HAVE I DONE, JOE...
I'M... I'M SORRY...

BUT ALL BECAUSE OF A SINGLE STUPID MISTAKE BY ME, A MAN WHO'S BEEN LIVING IN THE BOXING WORLD FOR THE PAST 3 DECADES...


YOU... YOU TRIED SO HARD OUT THERE...
AND YOU FOUGHT SO WELL...

W-WHAT THE HELL!
HOW COULD A DAMN SECOND MAKE SUCH A GODDAMN CRITICAL MISTAKE!?

GIMME MY MONEY BACK!

THIS WAS SHAPING UP TO BE THE 4-ROUNDER OF THE CENTURY BUT IT FIZZLES OUT LIKE THIS IN THE END...?

HOW'RE YOU GONNA MAKE UP FOR THIS, HUH!?

YEAH, GIVE US OUR MONEY BACK!

GIVE IT BACK!

RETURN IT BACK AT A PREMIUM, TOO!

I'LL KILL YOU, YOU BASTARD!

ACK!

AGHHH! PLEASE DO NOT THROW OBJECTS ONTO THE RING!

SHUT UP AND SIT DOWN, YOU GODDAMN JACKASSES!

SHUT UP!

WHY THE HELL IS IT ALWAYS "RETURN MUH MONEY!" WITH YOU PEOPLE!?

AND I'LL KICK YOUR ASS IF YOU LAY EVEN ONE FINGER ON MY MANAGER!

Y-YABUKI...

YEAH, A JOKE.

NO, I WAS JUST JOKING.

U-UHH,

WHAT, YOU GOT A PROBLEM WITH ME?

WHY'S HE ACTIN' SO BIG?

W-WHAT'S UP WITH HIM?

HUH?

SO EVEN IF I'M DISQUALIFIED, IT DOESN'T MEAN I LOST.

EXHIBITION MATCHES ARE LEFT UNDECIDED UNLESS ONE SIDE IS ACTUALLY KO'D.

HEH... DON'T BEAT YOURSELF OVER IT, OLD MAN.

K''

O... OKAY.

THERE'S NO USE IN BEATING YOURSELF UP OVER WHAT'S DONE.

JUST HURRY UP AND WIPE MY BLOOD AND SWEAT OFF, WILL YA?

EVEN THOUGH I FOUGHT BARELY TWO ROUNDS JUST NOW-

MAN, YOU KNOW,

OWW OWW OWWW!

I FEEL LIKE THEY'VE ALL BEEN BLOWN OFF MY SHOULDERS BY A REFRESHING BREEZE.

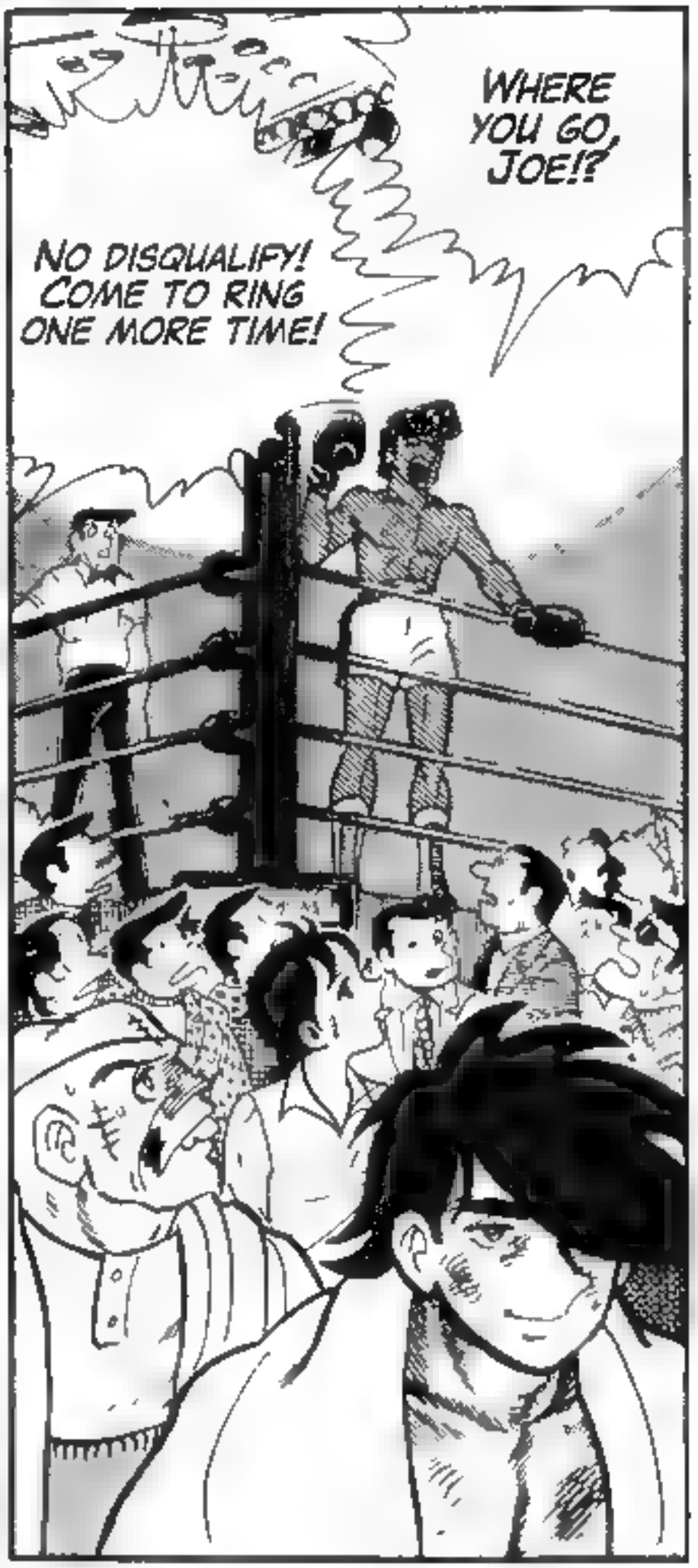
I FEEL FANTASTIC. EVERYTHING THAT'S BEEN EATING ME UP INSIDE EVER SINCE THE FIGHT WITH RIKIISHI...

ブッ
ガラ
ガラ
EVEN WHEN I HIT CARLOS IN THE HEAD WITH ALL OF MY STRENGTH,
I THINK THAT'S WHY,
NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT...
AHH!
NOW ISN'T THAT SOMETHING TO CELE-BRATE?
I DIDN'T GET QUEASY AT ALL...

I CAN FINALLY SAY "GOOD-BYE, RIKIISHI!" WITHOUT ANY REGRETS!
I'M FINALLY FREE FROM RIKIISHI'S CURSE!
A LITTLE LATE, I KNOW, BUT I'M FINALLY BACK.
YUP.
¡NO!
ALRIGHT, LET'S GET GOING, OLD MAN.
THANKS FOR EVERYTHING.
WELL, SEE YA THEN, CARLOS.

COME BACK!
COME BACK, JOE!

I DON'T CARE DISQUALIFY OR NOT! JUST CONTINUE FIGHT!
CONTINUE FIGHT, REF!


WHERE YOU GO, JOE!?
NO DISQUALIFY! COME TO RING ONE MORE TIME!

IF CARLOS IS SO INTENT ON SETTLING THE FIGHT...

¡TÚ CÁLLATE!
YOU CAN'T JUST DISREGARD THE RULES AS A WORLD-RANKED BOXER
CALM DOWN, CARLOS!

THEN WHY DON'T WE SCHEDULE ANOTHER DAY FOR THE TWO TO GO AT IT, ROBERT?

AND THIS TIME, WE'LL DO AWAY WITH 8OZ. GLOVES... WE DON'T WANT ANOTHER "FRIENDLY SPAR" WITH BAMBOO SWORDS AND WHATNOT.

M-MS. YOUKO...

AH-

LET'S HAVE THEM FIGHT SERIOUSLY THIS TIME. A 10-ROUND MAIN EVENT WITH 6 OZ. GLOVES!

NO! WE'RE RETURNING BACK HOME!

JUST TELL ME YOUR CONDITIONS, IF YOU HAVE ANY.

AS LONG AS YOU'RE WILLING, I'M MORE THAN READY TO MAKE ALL THE ARRANGEMENTS.

NO TENEMOS PRISA, ROBERT. (NO NEED TO RUSH, ROBERT)

CARLOS HAS AN IMPORTANT WORLD-TITLE MATCH TO PREPARE FOR! HE NEEDS TO RETURN TO VENEZUELA RIGHT AWAY!

WE'VE ALREADY BOOKED FLIGHTS FOR BACK HOME WHICH LEAVE TONIGHT!

¡UN MÁNAGER ESCUCHA LO QUE QUIERE SU PELEADOR, NO A LA INVERSA, ROBERT! (A MANAGER LISTENS TO HIS PLAYER'S WISHES, NOT THE OTHER WAY AROUND, ROBERT!)

B-BUT CARLOS...

QUIERO DEFINIR MI PELEA CON JOE ANTES DE IRME. (I WANT TO SETTLE MY FIGHT WITH JOE BEFORE I LEAVE)

AÚN TENEMOS TIEMPO ANTES DE ESA PELEA. (WE'VE STILL GOT SOME TIME BEFORE THAT FIGHT)

FINE...

. . . .

OH, BUT I DON'T REALLY NEED TO ASK, DO I?

WELL, WHAT SAY YOU TO THAT, YOU TWO?

YOU'RE ONE HELL OF A WOMAN.

I GOTTA SAY,

MNN...

RIGHT, OLD MAN?

HAHA. 'COURSE NOT!

SHOULD I NOT HAVE BOTHERED?

YOU'RE LIKE THE DEVIL.

LAYING DEVIOUS TRAPS TO ENSNARE ME TO DO YOUR BIDDING...

DON'T GLARE AT ME WITH SUCH CUNNING EYES.

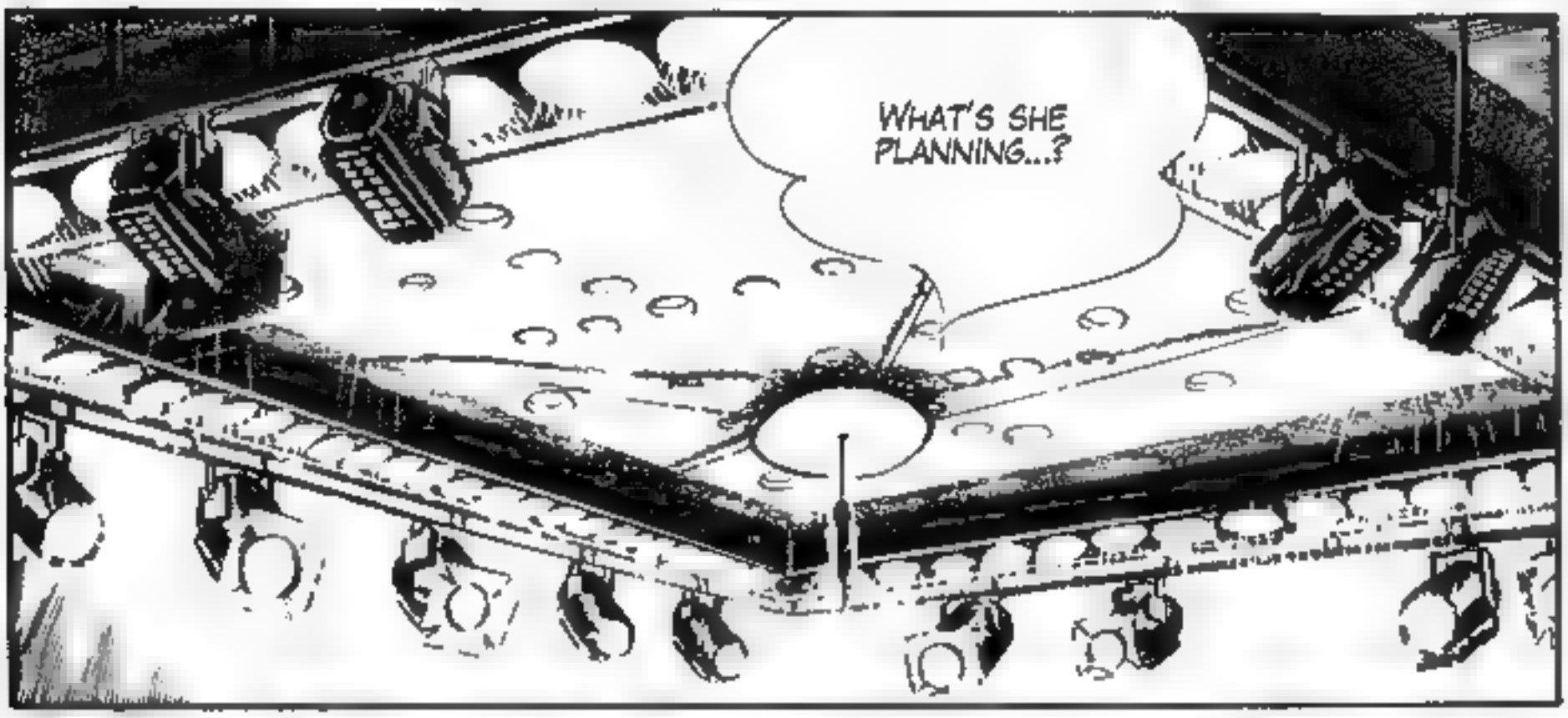
HAHA, THAT'S EXACTLY IT.

OH NO, I DON'T MIND AT ALL.

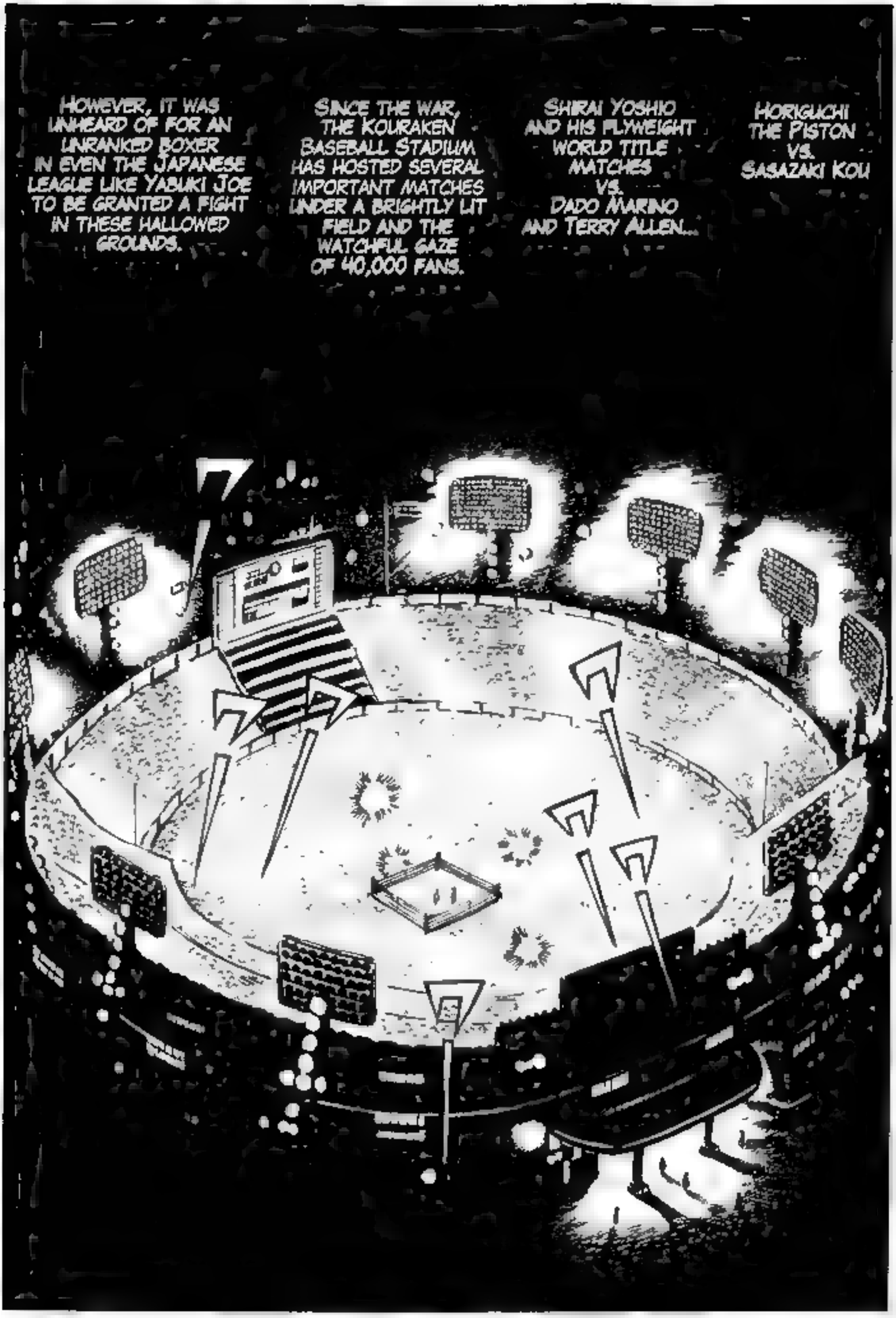
JUST A LITTLE TROUBLESOME THAT THE DEVIL LOOKS LIKE AN ANGEL IN MY EYES.

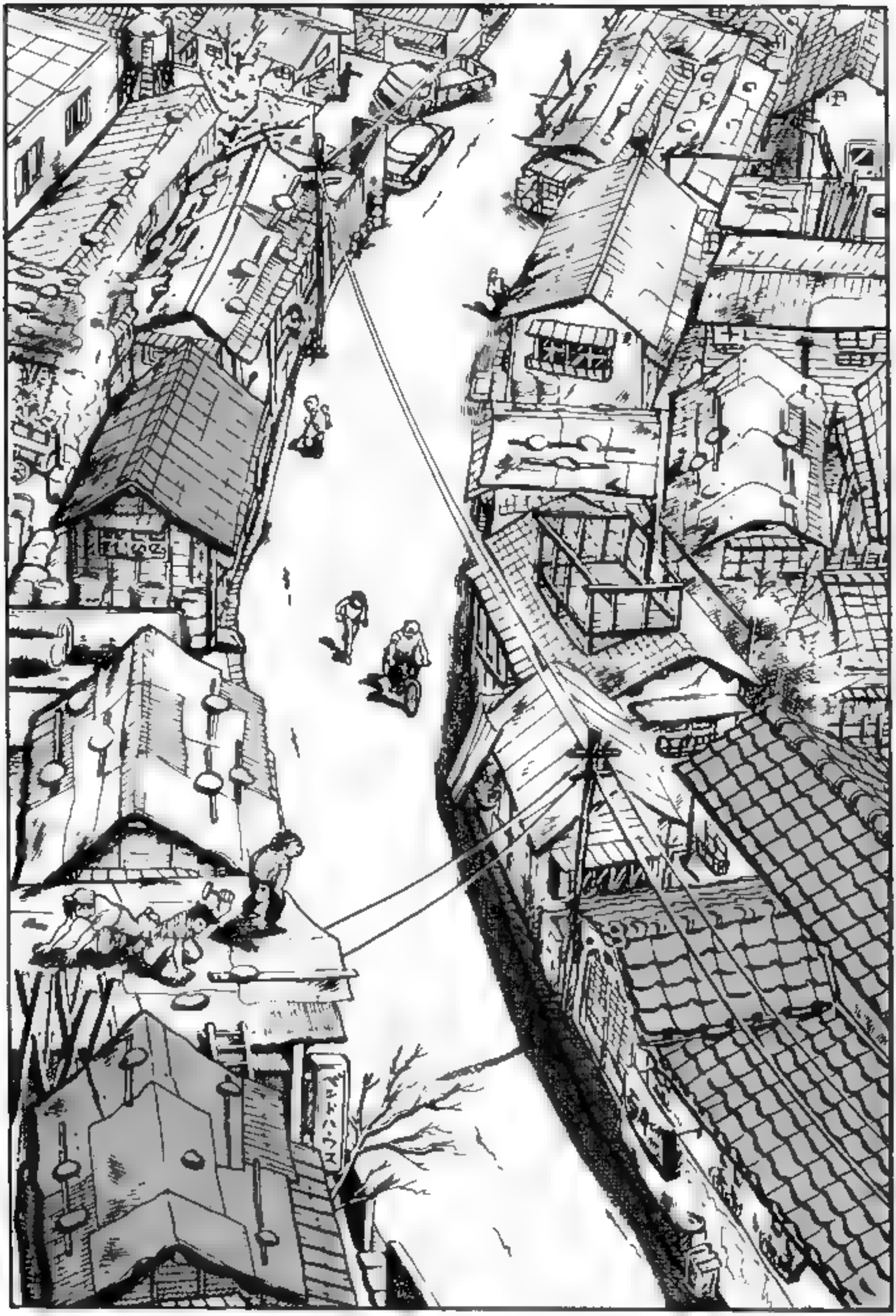
SO INSTEAD, WE'LL USE THE KOURAKUEN BASEBALL STADIUM!
I DON'T THINK THE BUDOUKAN, KOKUGIKAN, OR ANY OF THE OTHER STADIUMS IN TOKYO WILL DO EITHER.
BUT I COULDN'T HELP NOTICING THAT THIS STADIUM SEEMED A LITTLE TOO CRAMPED FOR A MATCH OF THE CENTURY LIKE THIS.
THEN IT'S SETTLED. A 10 ROUNDER BETWEEN CARLOS RIVER AND YABUKI JOE IT IS!

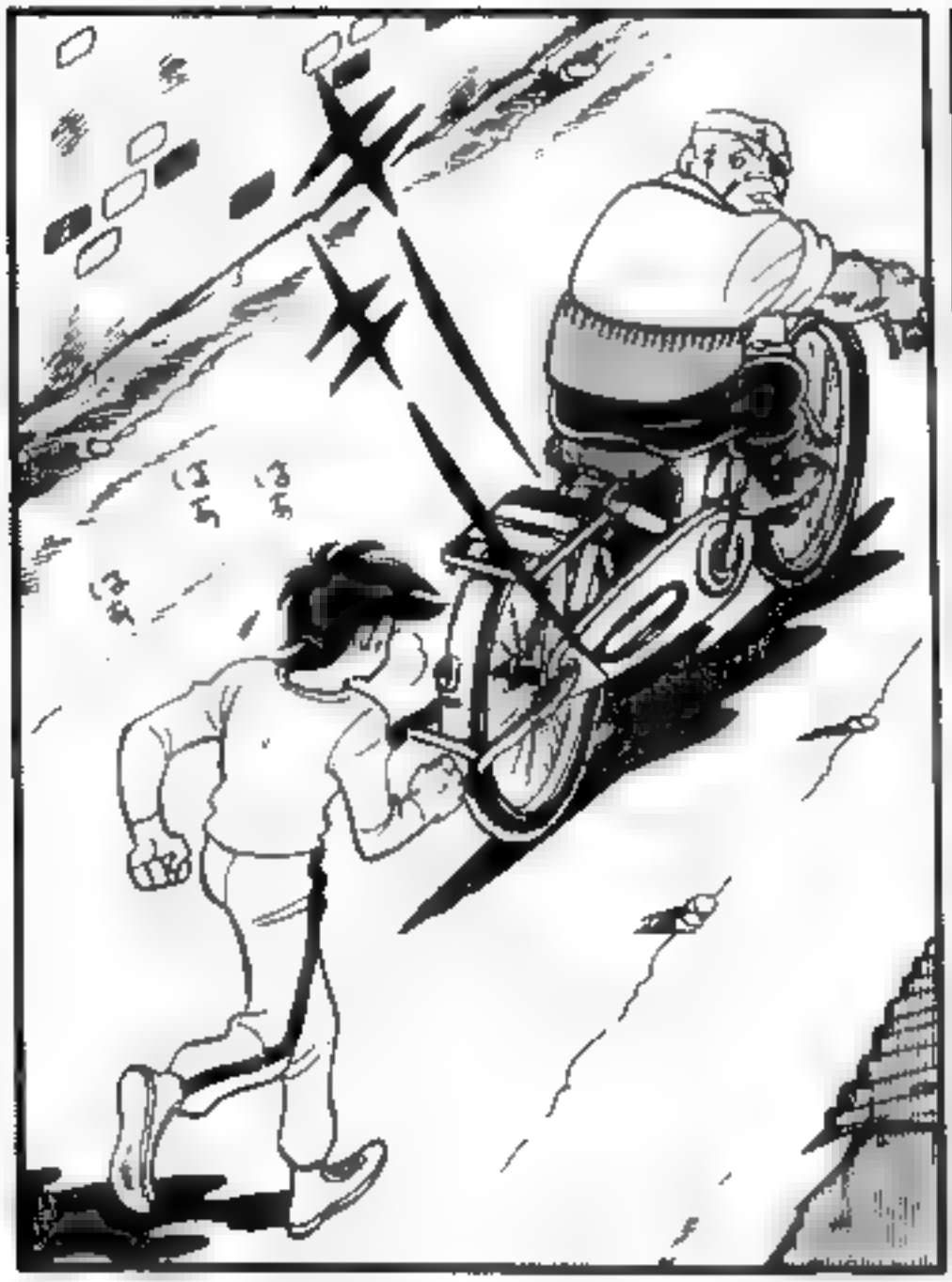
THE PLACE THAT CAN SEAT 40,000 FANS...?
WHA? THE KOURAKUEN BASEBALL FIELD...?

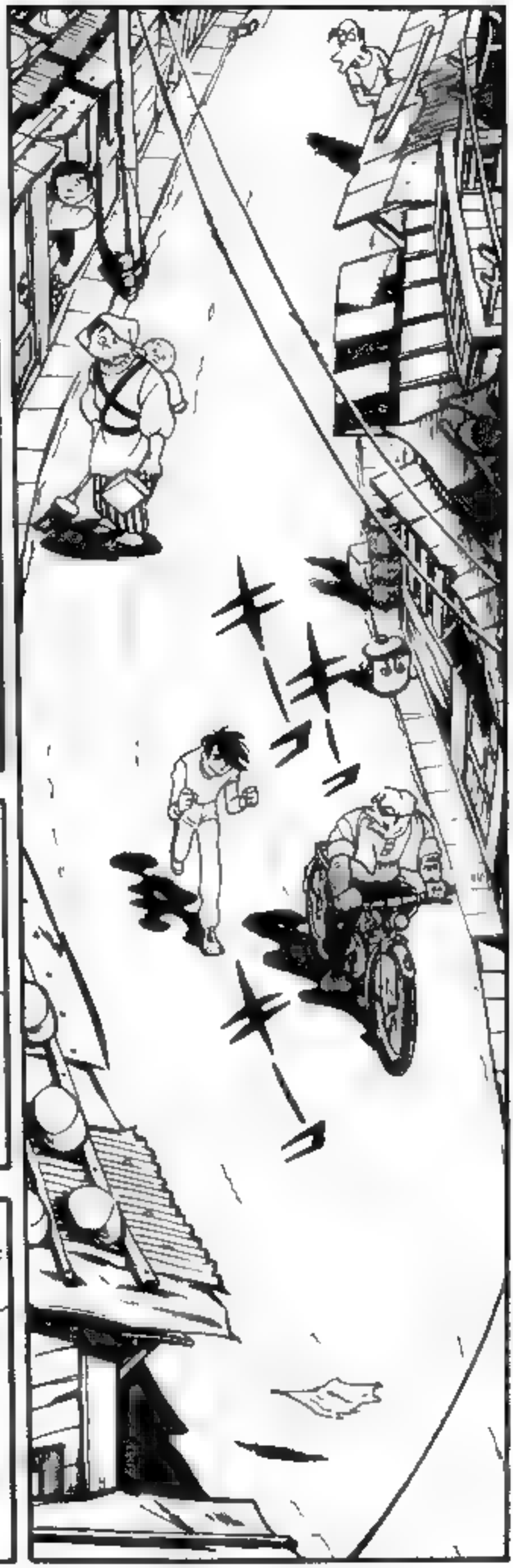

WHAT'S SHE PLANNING...?

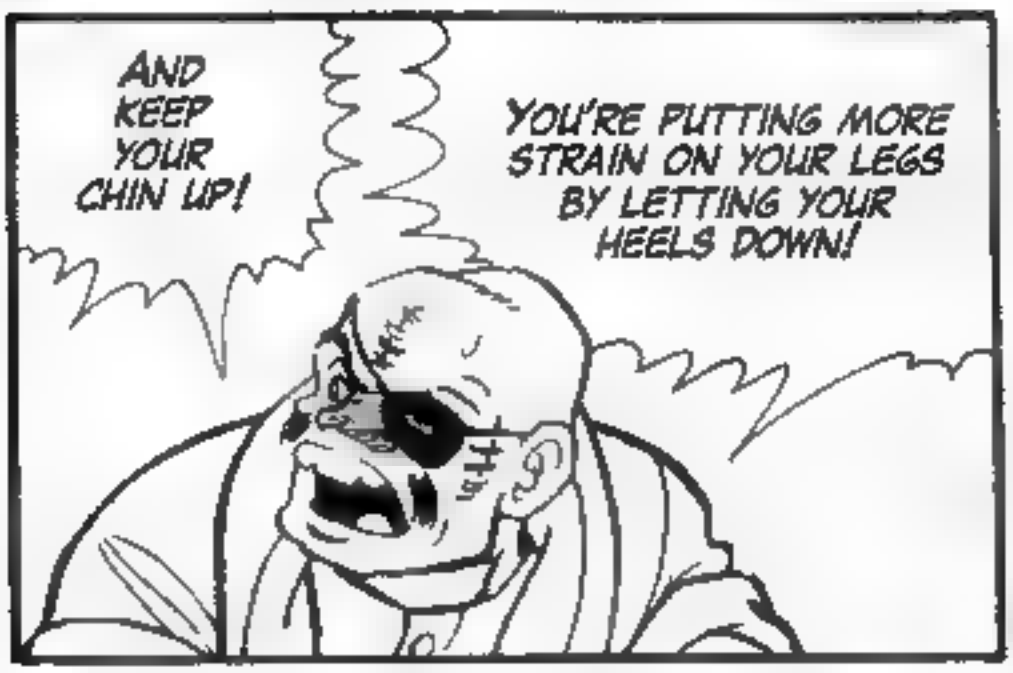
IS SHE SERIOUS?


HOWEVER, IT WAS UNHEARD OF FOR AN UNRANKED BOXER IN EVEN THE JAPANESE LEAGUE LIKE YABUKI JOE TO BE GRANTED A FIGHT IN THESE HALLOWED GROUNDS.
SINCE THE WAR, THE KOURAKEN BASEBALL STADIUM HAS HOSTED SEVERAL IMPORTANT MATCHES UNDER A BRIGHTLY LIT FIELD AND THE WATCHFUL GAZE OF 40,000 FANS.
SHIRAI YOSHIO AND HIS FLYWEIGHT WORLD TITLE MATCHES VS. DADO MARINO AND TERRY ALLEN...
HORIGUCHI THE PISTON VS. SASAZAKI KOU



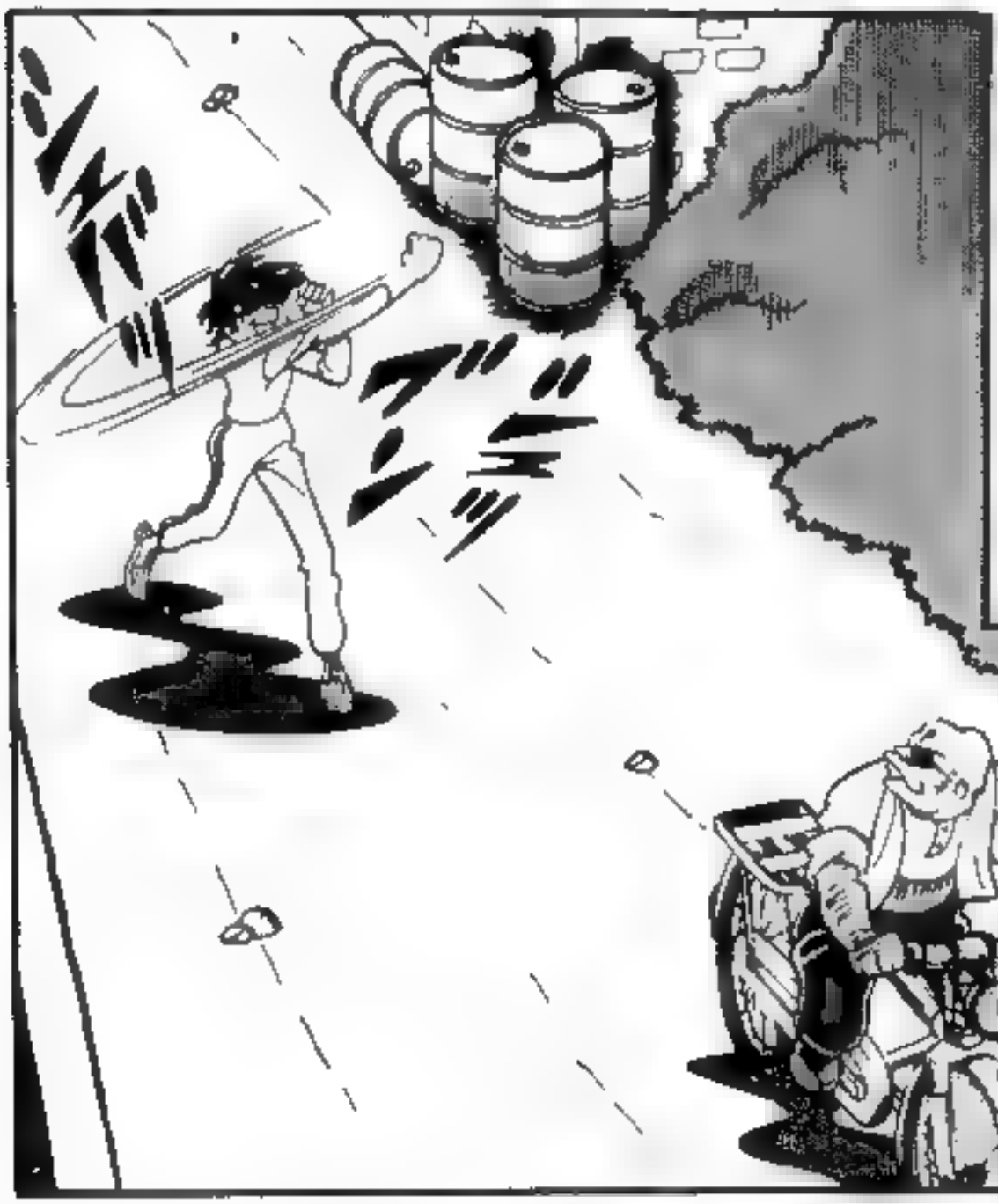





AND KEEP YOUR CHIN UP!
YOU'RE PUTTING MORE STRAIN ON YOUR LEGS BY LETTING YOUR HEELS DOWN!

HUFF
HUFF
HUFF

NOW START SHADOW-BOXING!
GOOD.



OH.

KEEP UP THE HARD WORK!
YEAH!
LOOKIN' GOOD, BRO!

GO JOE, GO!
YOU'RE THE BEST!

ALL IT TOOK WAS A LITTLE SCARE FOR HIM TO BUY US ANYTHING WE WANTED!
JUST SOME FOREIGNER WHO WALKED INTO TOWN.
WHAT A SCAREDY CAT.

DON'T PUSH YOUR LUCK AND GET CARRIED AWAY.
YOU RASCALS.
HEH HEH.

WHAT'S ALL THAT? PRETTY FANCY STUFF FOR KIDS LIKE YOU...
HUFF
HUFF
WHERE'D YOU GET IT?

YEAH, I KNOW.

HEAD BACK TO THE GYM AND DRY YOURSELF OFF!

JOE! WHAT'RE YOU WASTING TIME FOR!?

PROMISE TO PLAY WITH US WHEN YOU'RE DONE TRAINING!

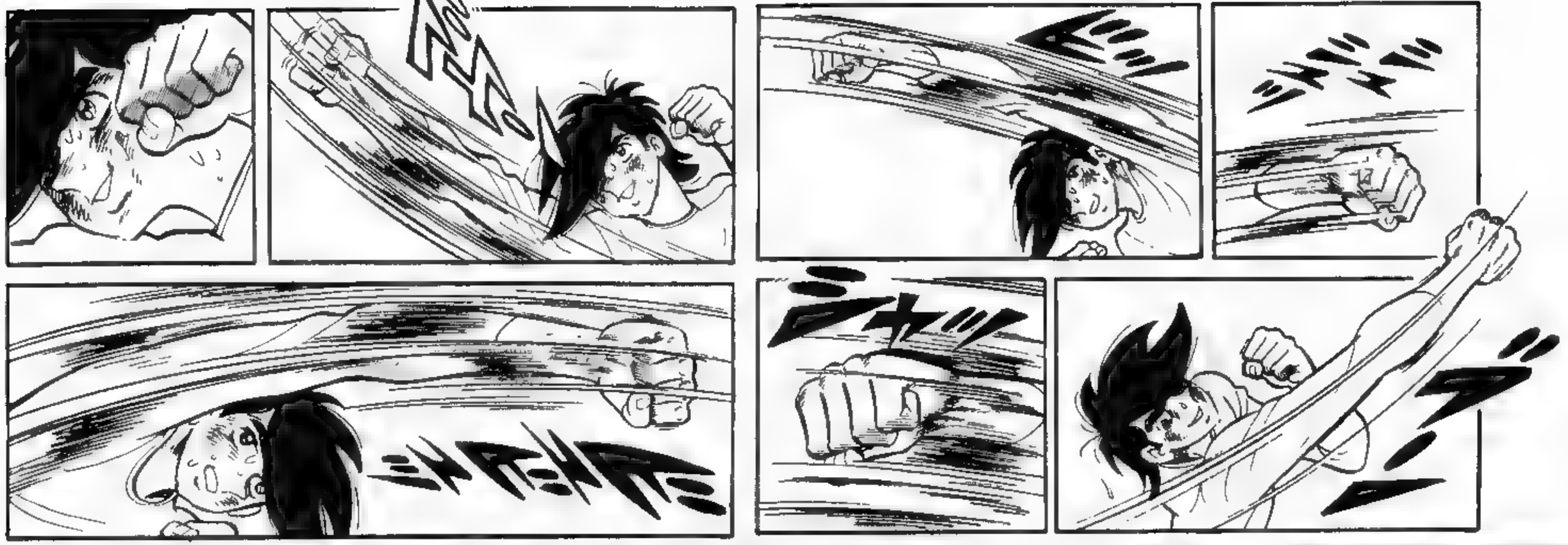
WE'LL COME TO PEEK BY LATER!

OH, THANKS.

I GAVE THEM SOME TEA TO DRINK WHILE THEY WAIT FOR YOU.

THOSE REPORTERS ARE HERE AGAIN AT THE GYM.

HAHA.



FEELS MORE LIKE AN ABANDONED HOUSE.

FOR A TRAINING GYM, THIS PLACE SURE IS LACKING ACTUAL TRAINEES...

ガチャ

...

I CAN'T BELIEVE YABUKI DOESN'T EVEN HAVE A SPARRING PARTNER EVEN THOUGH HE'S GOT SUCH A BIG MATCH COMING UP.

GEEZ,

WORKING HARD, I SEE.

HA...

MAKING ANY DOUGH?

HOW'S THE SHOP?

HEY, NISHI.

...

SPARRING WITH A RUSTY FIGHTER LIKE YOU WHO'S LEFT THE RING LONG AGO WILL ONLY MAKE ME RUSTIER.

NAH.

I CAN'T GO FOR TOO LONG, BUT I CAN BE YOUR SPARRING PARTNER FOR AT LEAST 2-3 ROUNDS IF YOU WANT.

JOE,

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT YOUR CHANCES OF WINNING FOR THE UPCOMING MATCH?

BY THE WAY, TANGE.

HE'S GOT A SHARP TONGUE AS EVER.

AHA HAHA.

...

CAN I ASSUME YOU'VE GOT SOME PLAN THAT'S EVEN BETTER THAN THE ROPE-STRATEGY IN THE PREVIOUS FIGHT?

JUDGING BY YOUR CALM DEMEANOR,

A PLAN, HUH...

WELL?

WHAT'S WITH THE DOWNCAST LOOK?

WHAT'S THE MATTER?

SO ACT MORE CONFIDENTLY AS THE LONE GUY ON THE HELM!

YOU'RE NOT ONLY MY COACH, BUT MY LONE TRAINER AND MANAGER AS WELL, AREN'CHA?

HOW EXACTLY ARE YOU PLANNING TO FIGHT HIM THIS TIME?

AFTER ALL, CARLOS RIVERA'S GONNA BE FIGHTING WITH HIS PRIDE AS THE 6TH RANKED BOXER IN THE WORLD...

IS IT BECAUSE YOU CAN'T PULL THE SAME CARD AS LAST TIME?

MN...

WHAT, ARE YOU DEAF OR SOMETHING!?

OUT WITH IT.

OH COME ON.

IT'S TOO DANGEROUS TO SEND OUT JOE INTO AN IN-FIGHT AGAINST A FOE LIKE THAT.

AND JUST AS NISHI POINTED OUT, RIVERA'S GONNA BE COMING FOR JOE WITH EVERYTHING HE'S GOT.

T-THE MATCH THIS TIME IS WITH 6 OZ. GLOVES...

...

I WOULD IF I COULD.

THAT YOU'RE GOING TO TRY TO PULL OUT ON THIS MATCH, ARE YOU NOW?

YOU'RE NOT IMPLYING,

THE ROPES?

NOW... SINCE I CAN'T DO THAT, I'LL HAVE TO TEST MY LUCK WITH THE ROPES AGAIN.

AND SO, JOE WON'T MOVE OUT INTO THE RING, WHILE RIVERA WON'T MOVE INTO THE ROPES.

JOE WILL LEAN BACK AGAINST THE ROPES. RIVERA'S OBVIOUSLY NO FOOL SO HE WON'T BE WILLING TO CHARGE IN THOUGH.

JUST LIKE BEFORE,

IT'LL BE PRETTY ANTI-CLIMACTIC BUT...

BASI-CALLY.

WOULDN'T THE MATCH SIMPLY TURN INTO A STARING CONTEST?

BUT THEN...

...

EVEN BY PULLING A DRAW, IT'LL SECURE JOE'S CHANCES OF BECOMING A RANKED-FIGHTER TOO!

THIS IS THE WORLD'S 6TH RANKED BOXER WE'RE TALKING ABOUT.

A FIGHT'S ONLY MADE POSSIBLE,

BY A WILING OPPONENT.

AM I EVER FORTUNATE TO HAVE SUCH A PATHETIC COACH.

HAHA... I EXPECTED AS MUCH FROM YOU.

A PRETTY LOW-LEVEL IDEA, I HAVE TO SAY.

AFTER BEING LUCKY ENOUGH TO HAVE RIVERA AND ROBERT COME UP TO US AND ASK FOR A FIGHT, YOU'RE GONNA TRY AND BACK OUT!?

THAT'S SO SAD I CAN'T EVEN SHED A TEAR.

MY DAD WANTED YOU TO GO TALK WITH THE DAIKOKU STORE'S OWNER SINCE HE'S TOO BUSY TO DO IT RIGHT NOW.

OH, OKAY.

...

NISHI.

ALRIGHT JOE, I'LL COME BACK WHEN I'M DONE WITH MY ERRAND.

I'LL COME BACK TO THE STORE ONCE I CLEAN THIS PLACE UP A LITTLE BIT.

WHAT ABOUT YOU, NORIKO?

JUST TAKE GOOD CARE OF THE STORE!

NO NEED, I CAN SEE THAT YOU'RE BUSY.

GOTTA HURRY.

IT'S BEEN A WHILE.

AH NISHI.

CARLOS ...?

AND HAVE YOU SEEN CARLOS BY ANY CHANCE?

WHERE IS MR. YABUKI'S GYM?

YOUKO?

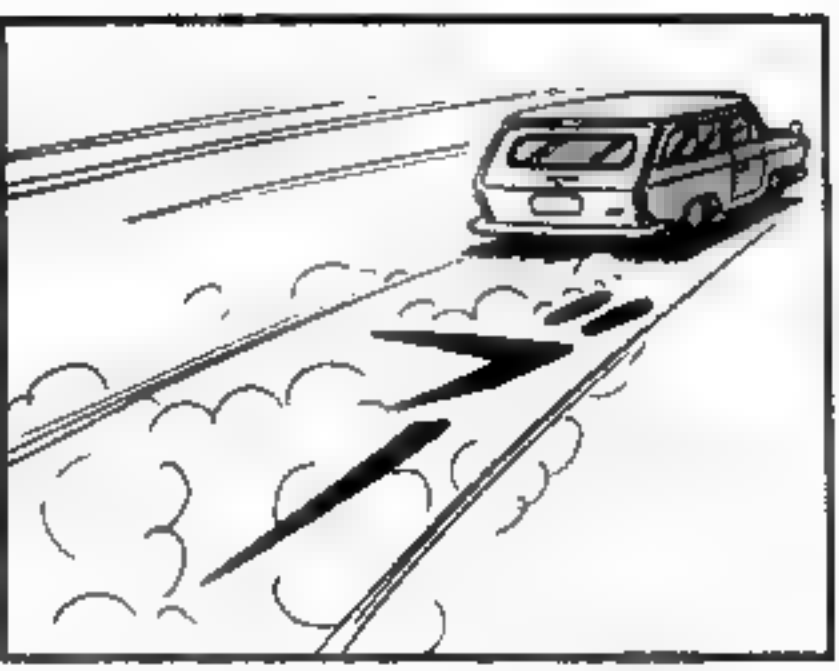
HE SAID SOMETHING ABOUT GOING OFF TO MEET WITH JOE AND LEFT OUR GYM SUDDENLY. WE HAVEN'T SEEN HIM AT ALL SINCE YESTERDAY.

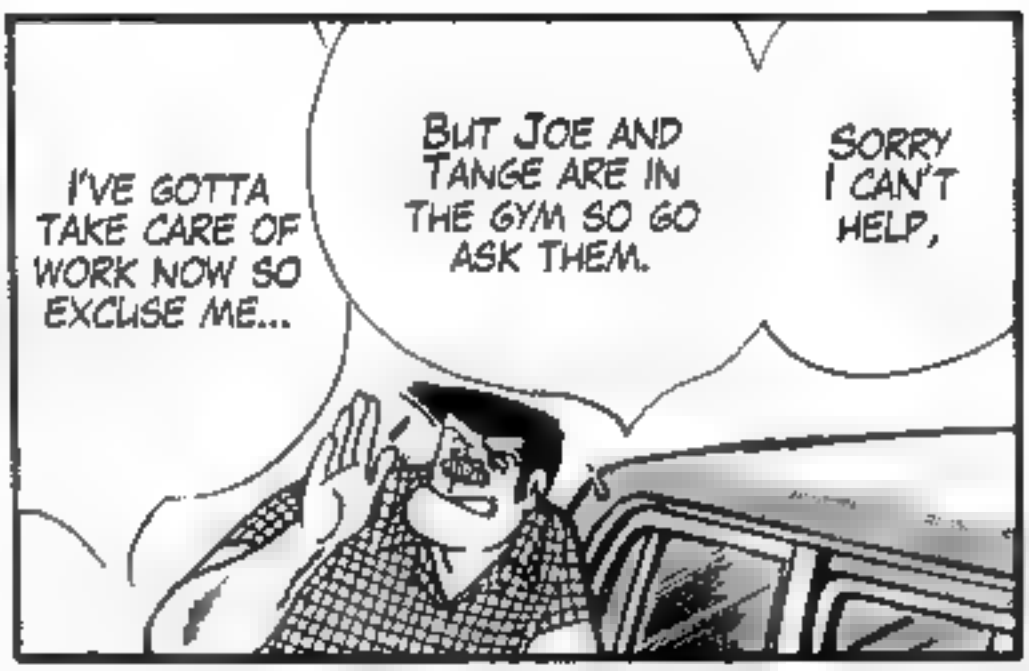
WELL, THAT'S...

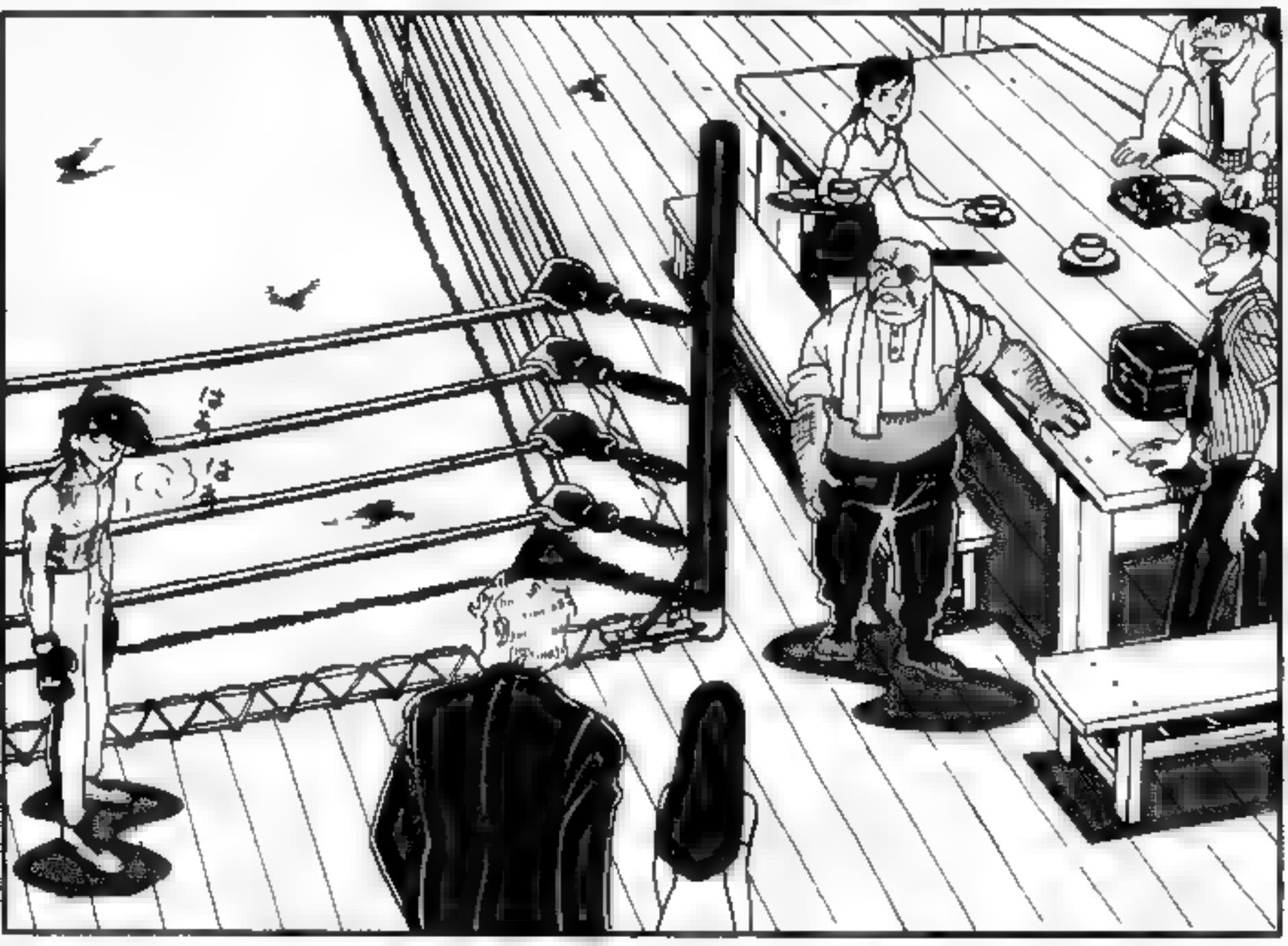
JOE'S GYM IS RIGHT HERE BUT THERE'S NO WAY CARLOS WOULD BE HERE.

HMM...

HE'S BEEN GONE SINCE YESTERDAY AFTER SAYING HE WAS GONNA SEE JOE!?




I'VE GOTTA TAKE CARE OF WORK NOW SO EXCUSE ME...
BUT JOE AND TANGE ARE IN THE GYM SO GO ASK THEM.
SORRY I CAN'T HELP,



DON'T PUT THIS ON THE PAPERS!

THIS IS A BIG SCOOP!
DID YOU HEAR THAT?

CARLOS RIVERA'S BEEN MISSING SINCE YESTERDAY...!?

HOLD UP.

LET'S GO, ROBERT.

THERE'S NO NEED TO CAUSE A BIG FUSS OVER A GROWN-MAN GOING OUT ON HIS OWN FOR 1 OR 2 DAYS.

WELL IN ANY CASE, HE HEADED FOR MY PLACE, DIDN'T HE?

THE GYM MEMBER WHO ORIGINALLY REPORTED THIS DIDN'T MENTION ANYTHING ELSE.

I DON'T KNOW.

WHAT DID HE WANT WITH ME?

CHUUKICHI!

SACHI!!!

TAROOO!

WELL, THEN...

'SCUSE ME FOR A SEC.

IS HE WHITE OR BLACK?

WHO IS THIS FOREIGNER?

AH, KINOKO.

THEY'RE PROBABLY PLAYING WITH THAT FOREIGNER AGAIN.

TARO AND THE OTHERS ARE AT THE TAMAHIME PARK.

CARLOS?

AH-

HAPPEN TO BE CARLOS RIVERA, WOULD HE?

HE WOULDN'T ...

SEEMS PRETTY FRIENDLY.

モリ モリ

I THINK HE'S LATINO.

ハウス

IN ANY CASE, I WONDER WHAT HE WANTED TO SEE ME FOR..

AND WHAT'S HE DOING PLAYING AROUND AT SOME PARK? WEIRD GUY.

N-N-N...

NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT...

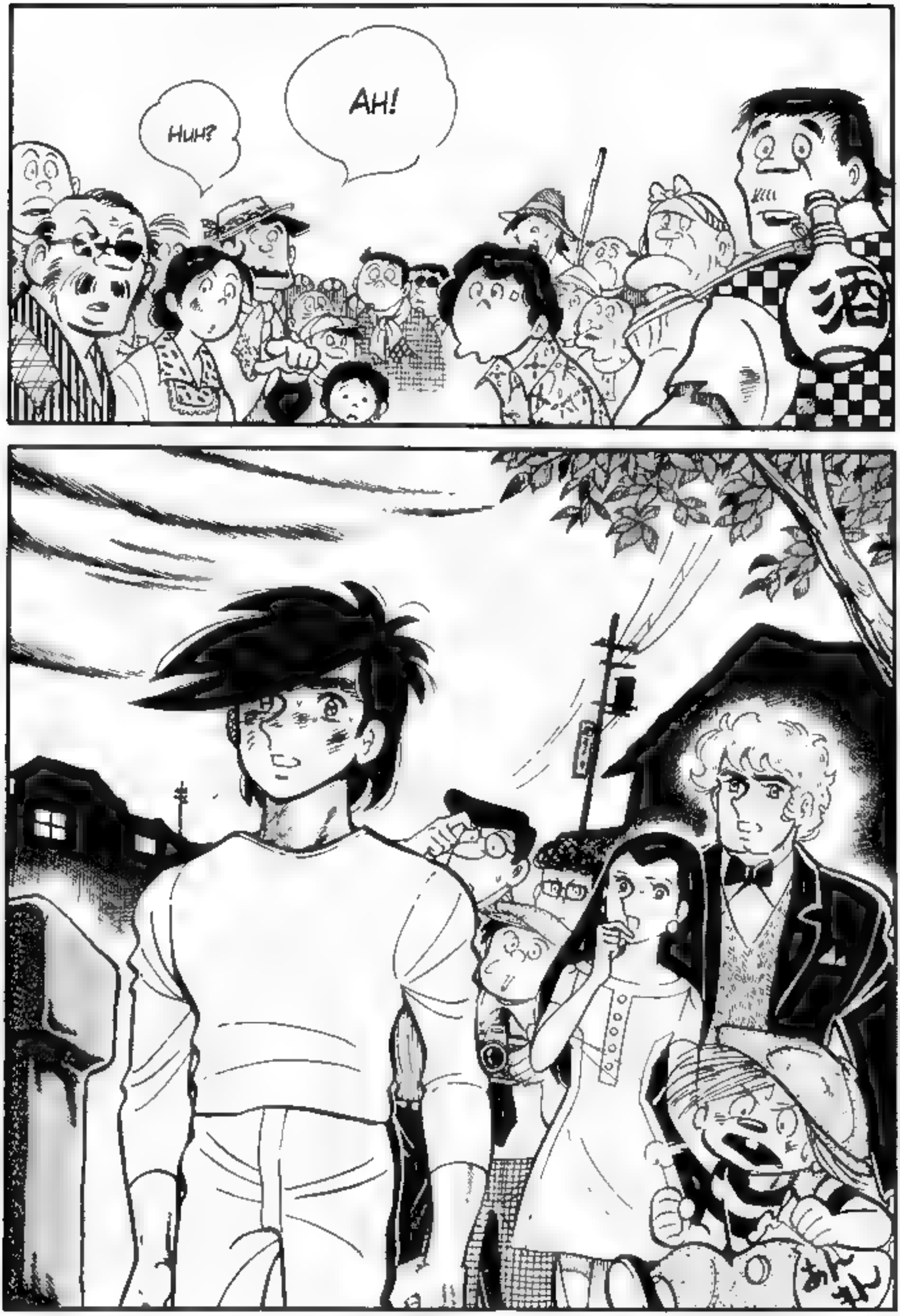
ぱあ

OH FOR GOD'S SAKE. COULDN'T THOSE KIDS AT LEAST REMEMBER CARLOS' FACE AFTER COMING TO SEE THAT EXHIBITION MATCH?

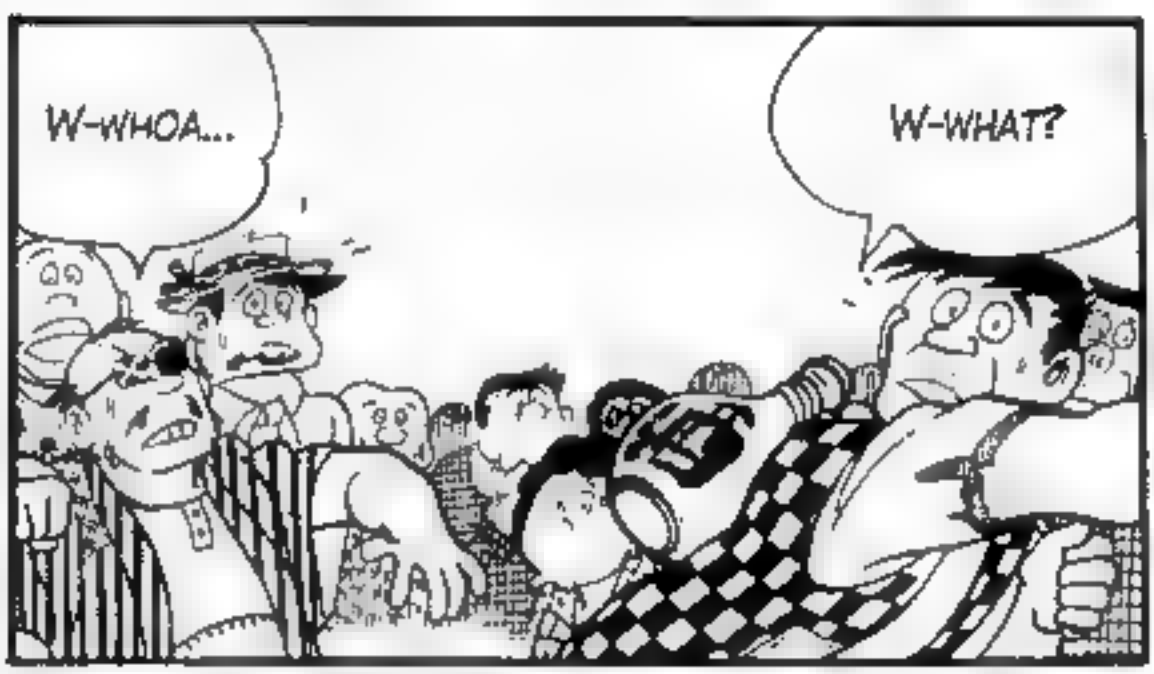
SWORDS INTO PLOUGHSHARES,
THE DAWN OF AGE OF PEACE.
HOW BLESSED IT IS,
TO BEAR OUR LORD IN OUR HEARTS.

BEADS OF SWEAT,
ROLLING DOWN THE FOREHEAD.
SEEDS OF WHEAT,
INTO GOLDEN EARS.
THIS IS OUR WAY,
TO BLESS THE FORTUNE AND LIVES
OF OUR PEOPLE.

LET US FINISH OUR DAY'S WORK SOON,
AND REST BY THE FIELDS TOGETHER.
HANG OUR SICKLES AND HOES UP,
AND PRAY THE LORD FOR HIS BLESSING.

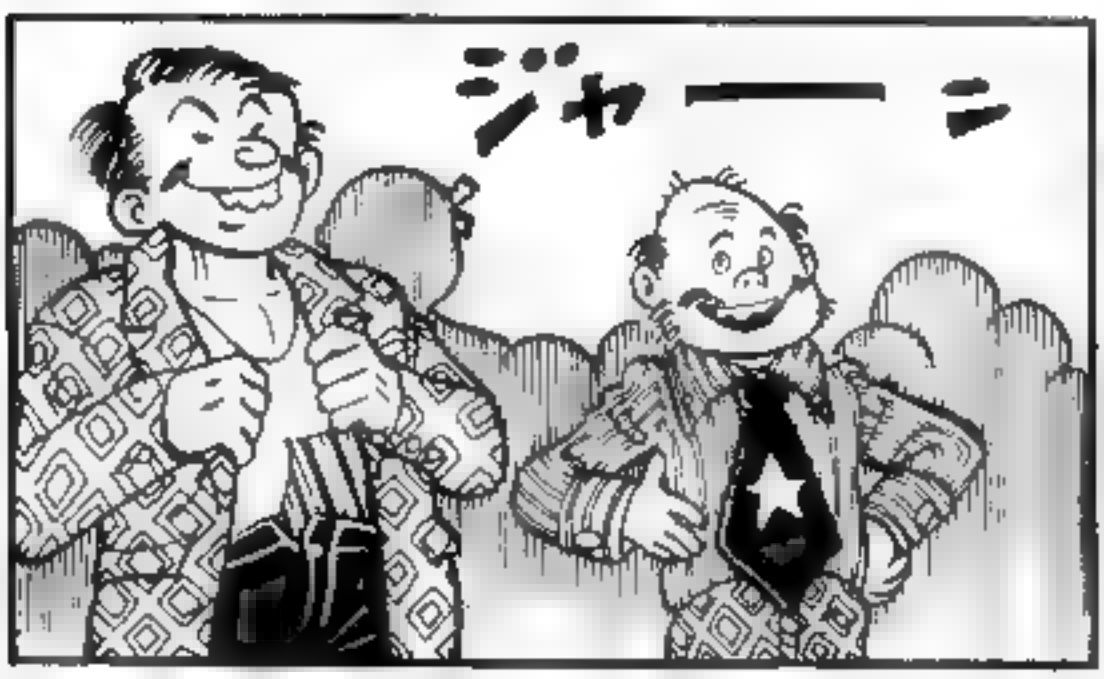

HUH?
AH!

THOSE GUYS ARE...
JOE...?


W-WHOA...
W-WHAT?

THERE YOU ARE!

WHAT'S WITH YOUR CLOTHES!?



I TRADED WITH THOSE FOLKS OVER THERE.

DIDN'T YOU DRIVE OUT HERE?
WHAT ABOUT YOUR CAR?

I'VE ALREADY LICKED MY OWNERSHIP ALL OVER THESE BABIES!
THAT'S RIGHT!
NO TRADE-BACKSIES NOW!

DON'T BE LIKE THAT. I'LL BUY YOU ANOTHER CAR OR TWO WITH MY FIGHT MONEY IF YOU WANT!

I NEEDED SOME MONEY TO HAVE FUN WITH THE FOLKS HERE.

I SOLD IT.

OHH, NOT AGAIN!

SO WHAT IS IT YOU WANTED, CARLOS?

I HEAR YOU CAME TO SEE ME...

WHAAA-

YEAH, THIS GUY IS ACTUALLY CARLOS RIVERA!

C- C- CARLOS!?

I'M ASKING YOU WHAT YOU'RE DOING LOITERING AROUND HERE!

WELL?

DAMN!

CARLOS RIVERA? THE GUY THAT OUR JOE'S HAVING ANOTHER MATCH WITH, THIS TIME AT THE KOURAKUEN BASEBALL STADIUM...?

WHAT A FUN DAY!

SO I ACCIDENTALLY PLAY WITH THEM LONGER THAN EXPECTED.

I LOOK FOR TANGE GYM BUT THIS TOWN AND PEOPLE, I LIKE VERY MUCH.

...

IT SEEMS HE GOT CAUGHT UP IN HIS NOSTALGIA FOR HOME.

IT REMINDS HIM OF THE SLUMS HE GREW UP BACK IN VENEZUELA.

CARLOS QUITE LIKES TOWNS LIKE THESE NO MATTER THE COUNTRY.

ドサッ

HMPH!

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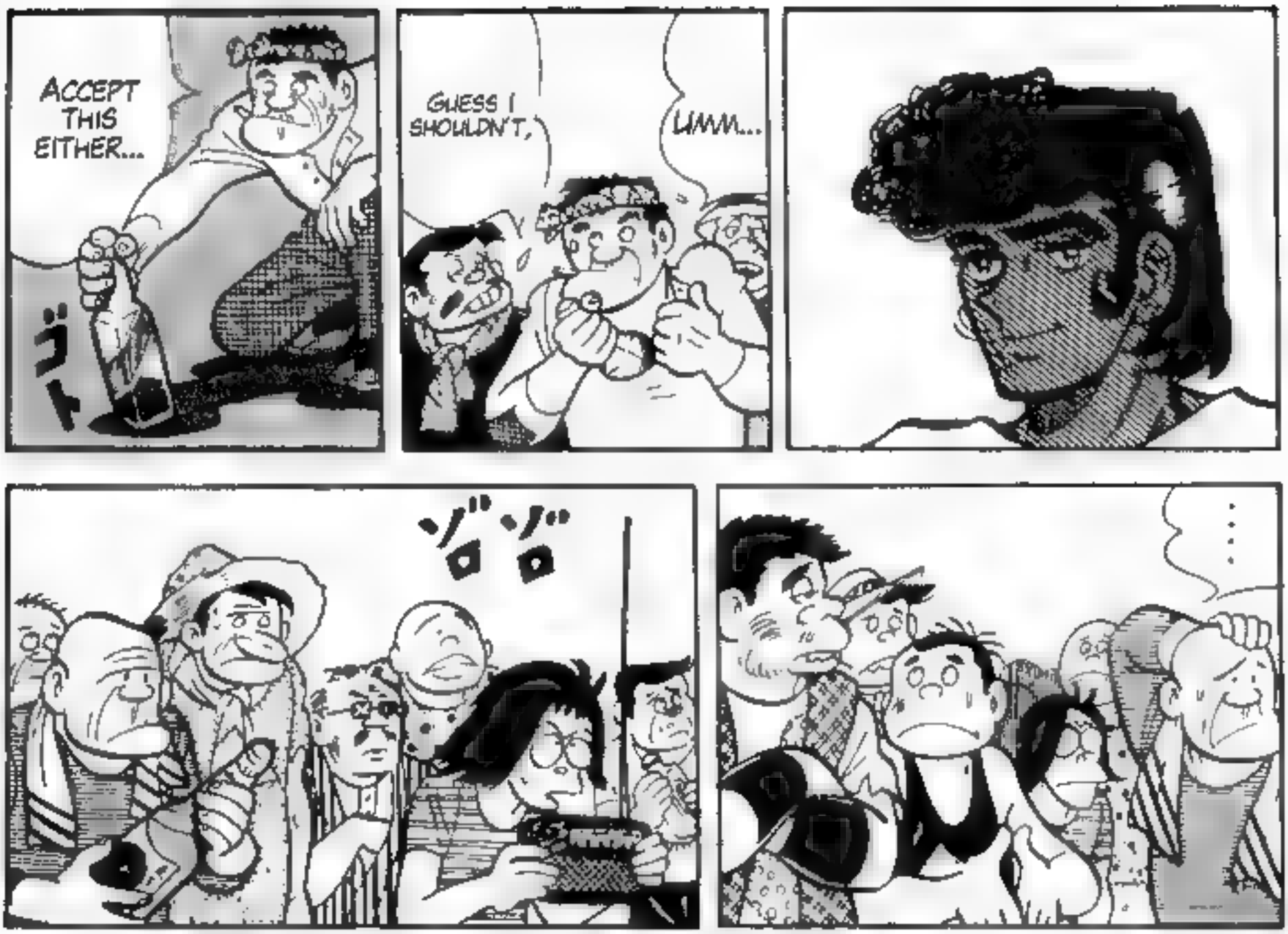
WE DON'T NEED YOUR GIFTS!

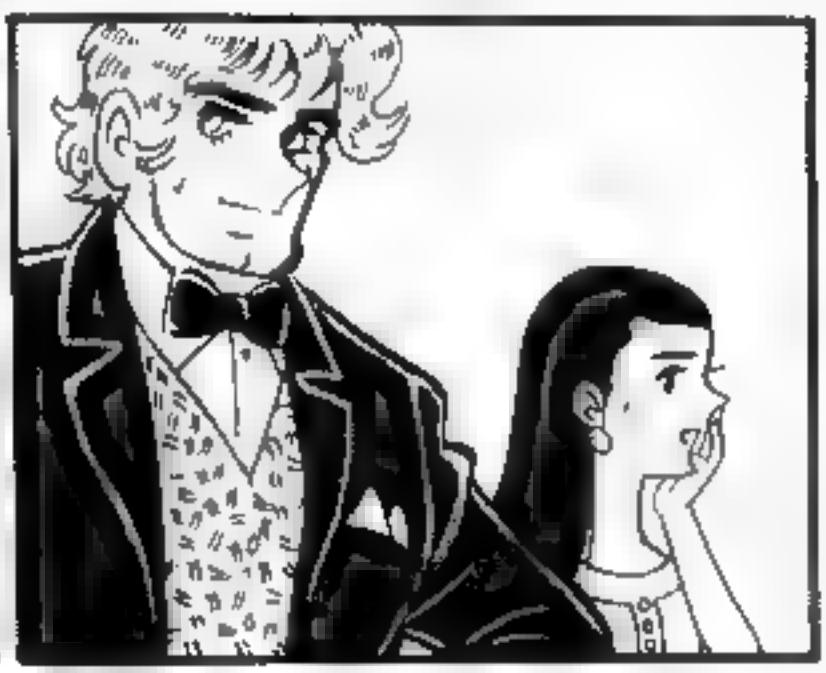
TAKE IT!


ACCEPT THIS EITHER...
GUESS I SHOULDN'T,
UMM...
ゾゾゾ
・・・・

WE WOULDN'T HAVE ACCEPTED IN THE FIRST PLACE IF WE KNEW HE WAS YOUR ENEMY THOUGH!
THEY'RE ALL STUFF THAT HE BOUGHT FOR US.

WHAT IS ALL THIS?

THERE'S NO REASON TO GIVE'EM BACK.
HMPH.



WELL...
BUT...

SUIT YOURSELF WHILE I HELP MYSELF THEN.

BUT OUTSIDE THE RING, THEY'RE TWO LIKE-MINDED COMRADES LIVING IN THE SAME WORLD. IT'S NOT POLITE TO REJECT THE GOOD WILL OF YOUR FELLOW MAN SO JUST ACCEPT THE GIFTS.
JOE AND CARLOS MIGHT BE OPPONENTS ON THE RING,

I THOUGHT AS MUCH.

BUT OUR GYM'S OVER THERE. FOLLOW ME.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE UNCROWNED EMPEROR WANTS WITH ME,

KNOCK IT OFF!

HEY!

O-

OK...

HEH HEH, YOU'RE A CUTE ONE, MISSY. HOW 'BOUT A KISS WITH ME?

KYAA!

HEE HEE, DON'T TRY TO RUN FROM US!

AH, WERE YOU DOING THE LAUNDRY AGAIN, NORIKO? YOU REALLY NEEDN'T BOTHER...

OH, I THOUGHT IT'D BE A GOOD TIME TO DO SO SINCE THE REPORTERS LEFT...

SORRY, I'LL DRY THEM OUTSIDE.

SHE'S GLARING AT NORIKO.

LOOK! LOOK AT YOUKO'S EYES.

THEN WHAT KIND OF EYES ARE YOURS RIGHT NOW?

I CAN TELL 'CAUSE I'M A WOMAN.

THOSE ARE THE EYES OF A JEALOUS WOMAN IN LOVE.

SHE'S CLEARLY FALLEN FOR JOE.

WHY DON'T YOU TELL ME WHAT YOU WANT WITH ME ALREADY?

NO NEED FOR YOU TO WORRY ABOUT THAT.

THIS GYM SHABBIER THAN I HEARD.

HA...

I CAME TO HELP YOU OUT AS SPARRING PARTNER, IF YOU WANT.

I HEARD MAN RISKING LIFE TO FIGHT ME CAN ONLY SHADOW BOX IN POOR LONELY GYM.

THINK OF IT AS THANK-YOU GIFT. FOR SPARRING WITH ME BACK BEFORE I FIGHT TIGER OZAKI...

WHAT A LOAD OF BULL! YOU'RE HERE TO FIGURE OUT JOE'S SECRET FIGHTING STRATEGY, AREN'CHA!?

SPARRING TO PAY BACK YOUR DEBTS? HA!

PETTY...?

I'M NOT INTEREST IN PETTY ROPE-CLINGING PLAN.

HAHA... FIGHTING STRATEGY? JOE YABUKI'S?

THERE NOTHING SCARY ABOUT YOU ON ROPES NO MORE.

A WAY TO PREVENT YOU FROM USING IT...!

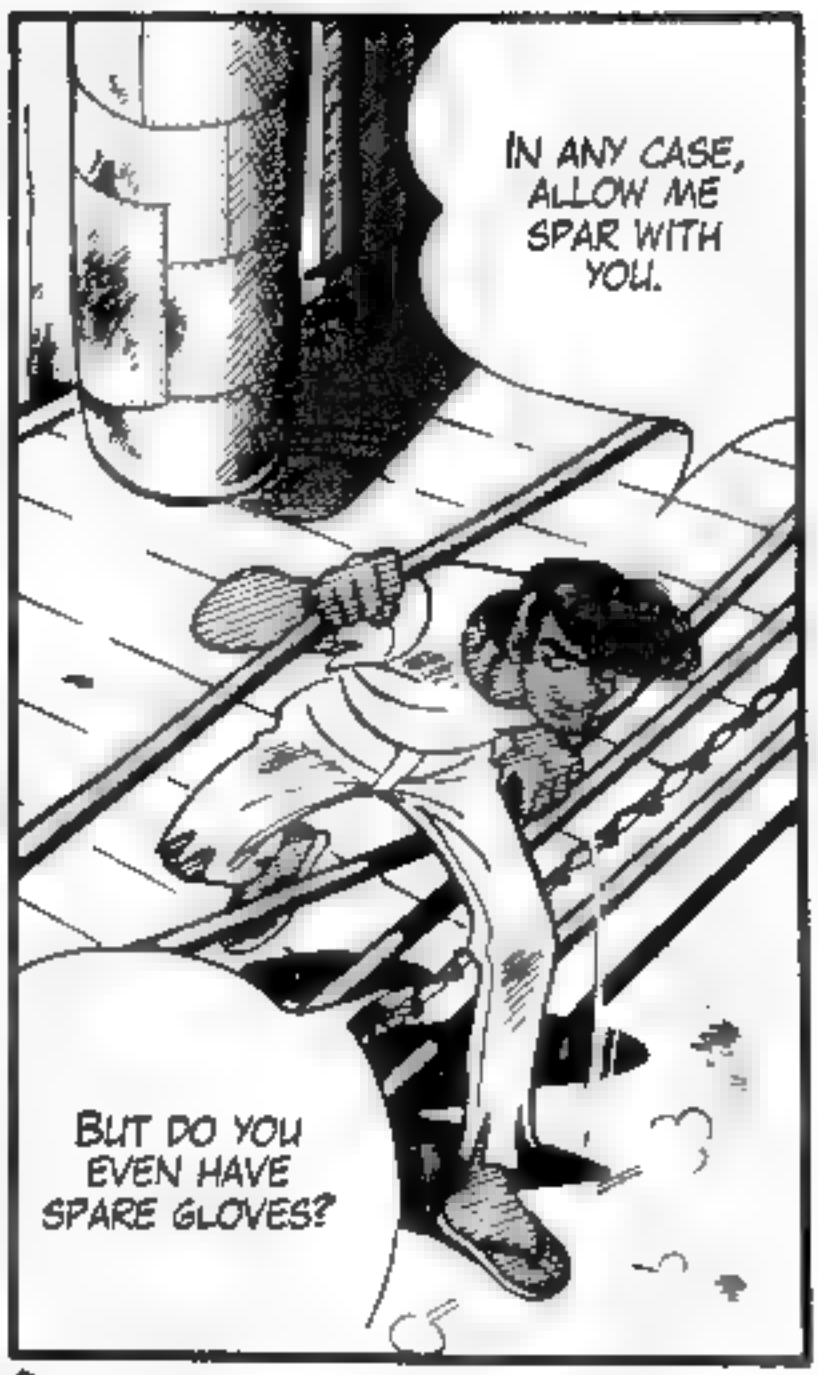
ROBERT AND I ALREADY COME UP WITH WAY TO COUNTER THAT PLAN SOON AFTER OUR FIGHT THAT NIGHT.

WELL, ROBERT? CARE TO SAY SOMETHING?

JUST PROVE IT TO HIM DIRECTLY ON THE NIGHT OF THE FIGHT.

CARELESS TALK COSTS LIVES.

OF COURSE!


IN ANY CASE, ALLOW ME SPAR WITH YOU.
BUT DO YOU EVEN HAVE SPARE GLOVES?

J-JOE, NO!
I'VE EVEN GOT 6 OZ. GLOVES JUST LIKE THE ONES WE'LL BE USING IN OUR UPCOMING FIGHT!

AHHH...

ドドド

AH-

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ROBERT ...!

WHAT'S WITH THE CROWD?
オロ
AH, NISHI!

WHAT A SCOOP!
NEVER THOUGHT I'D SEE A SNEAK-PREVIEW OF THE UPCOMING FIGHT IN A SHABBY PLACE LIKE THIS!
W-WHOA, THINGS ARE GETTING EXCITING!

WHAT ABOUT HEAD GEAR?

AND...

PRETTY OLD GLOVES BUT OH WELL.

HM...

I WON'T AIM FOR YOUR HEAD AT ALL SO COME ON, LET'S DO THIS ALREADY!

AS IF WE NEED THOSE STUFFY THINGS!

N-NO, YOU IDIOT! STOP!

IF YOU WANT TO SPAR SO BADLY WITH ME, THEN LET'S SEE WHAT YOU GOT!

AT THIS RATE, THIS WON'T BE SIMPLE SPAR FOR LONG...

HO... INTENSE RUSH.

YOU'VE GOTTA STOP THIS INSTANT!

PLEASE!

JOE, STOP!

NGH-

HA...

HEH HEH.

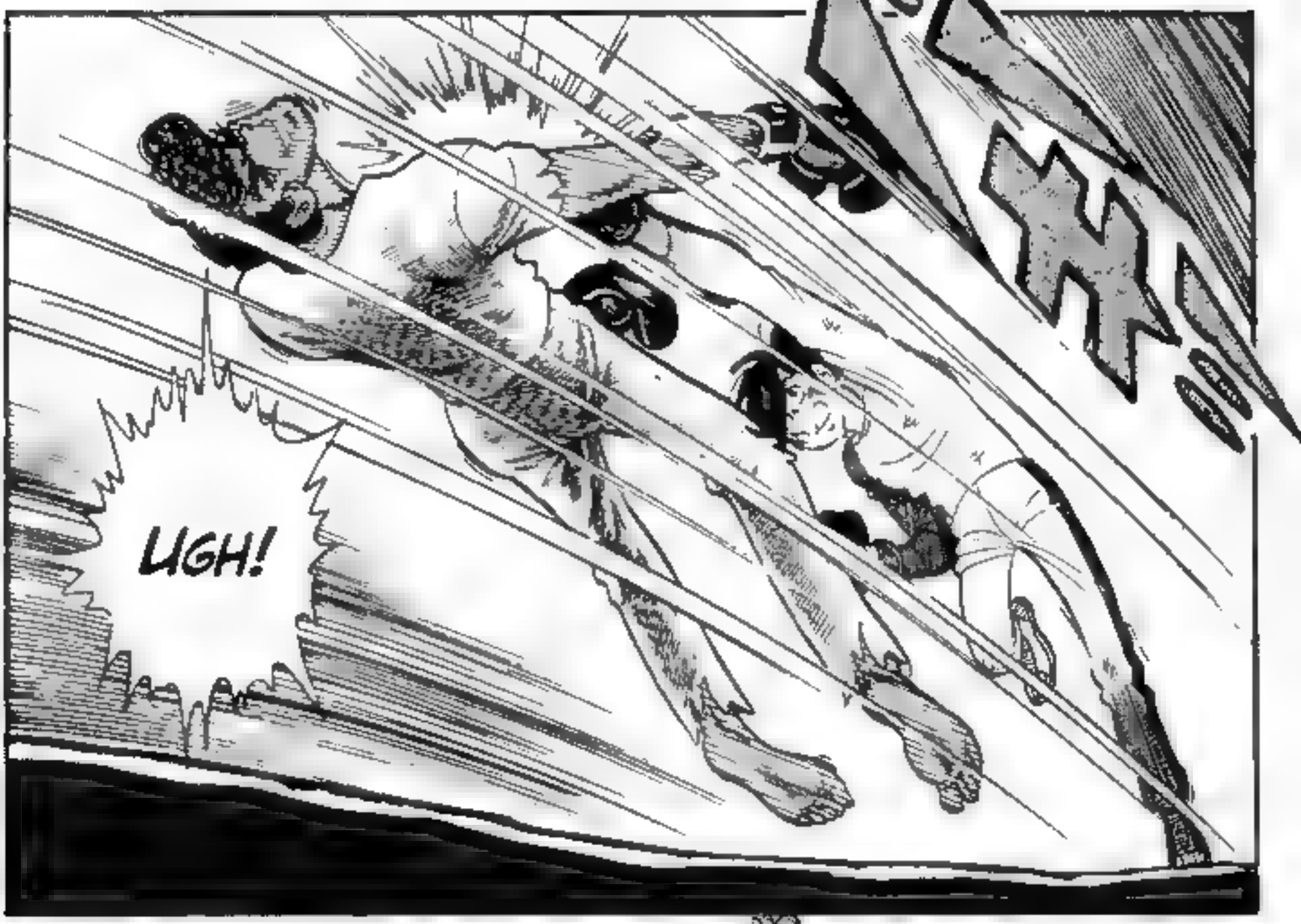
ZOOM

HUFF

HUFF

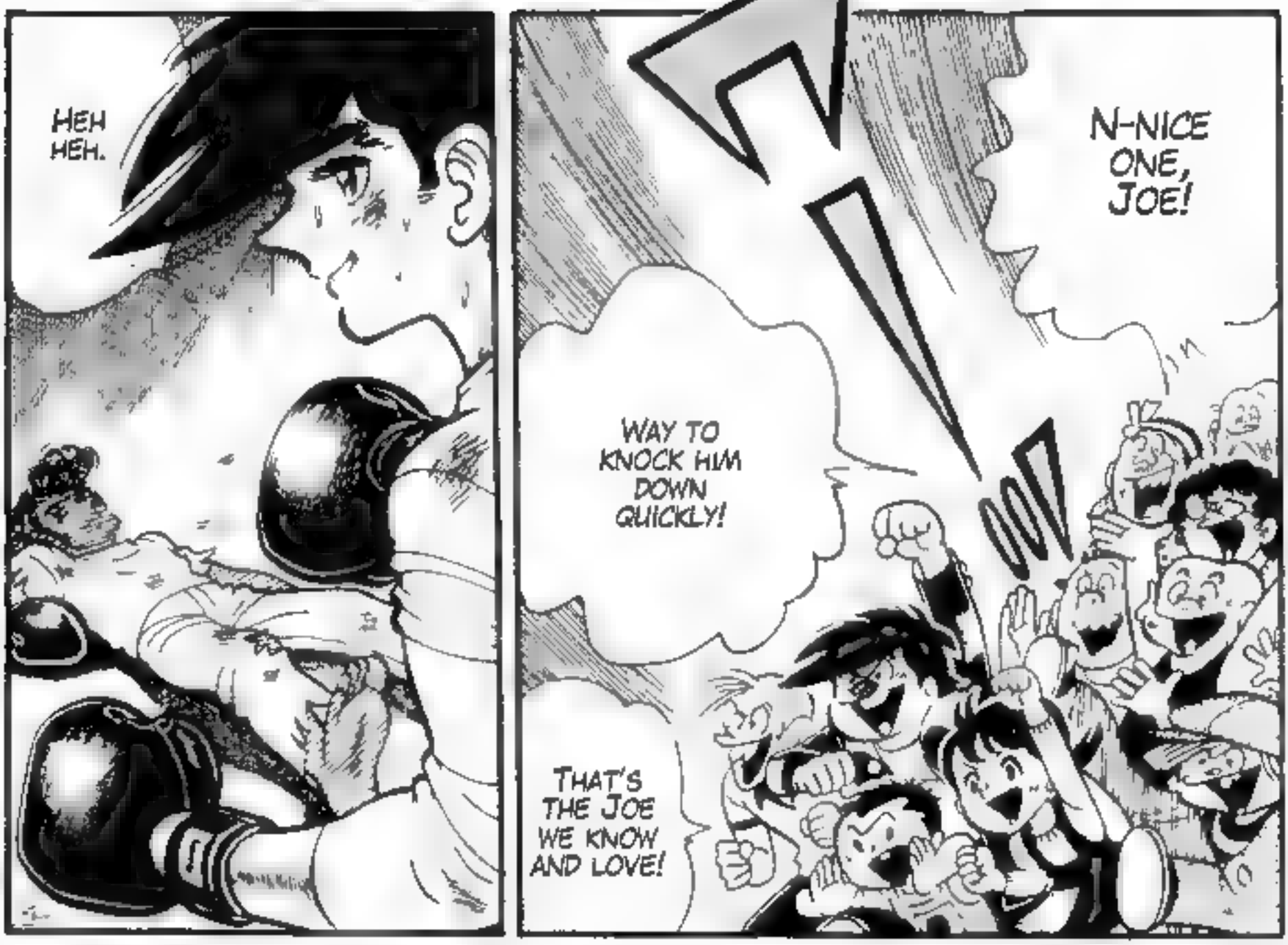
SERIOUS, AREN'T YOU?

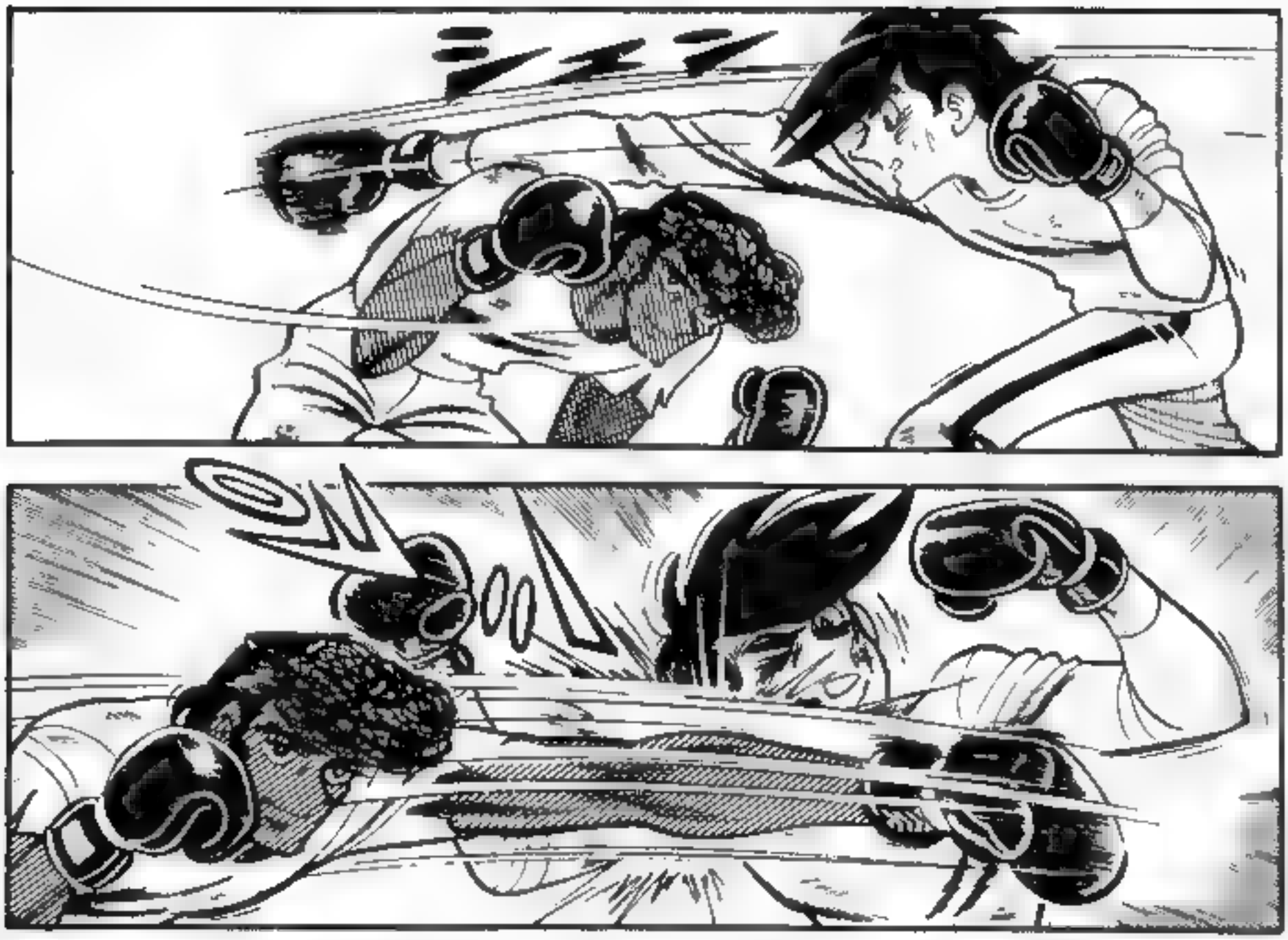
OOF.


UGH!

AHHH!

AGH!


HEH HEH.
N-NICE ONE, JOE!
WAY TO KNOCK HIM DOWN QUICKLY!
THAT'S THE JOE WE KNOW AND LOVE!



HMPH.

AGHHHHHH!

J-JOE...

TOUGH AS ALWAYS...

HEH.

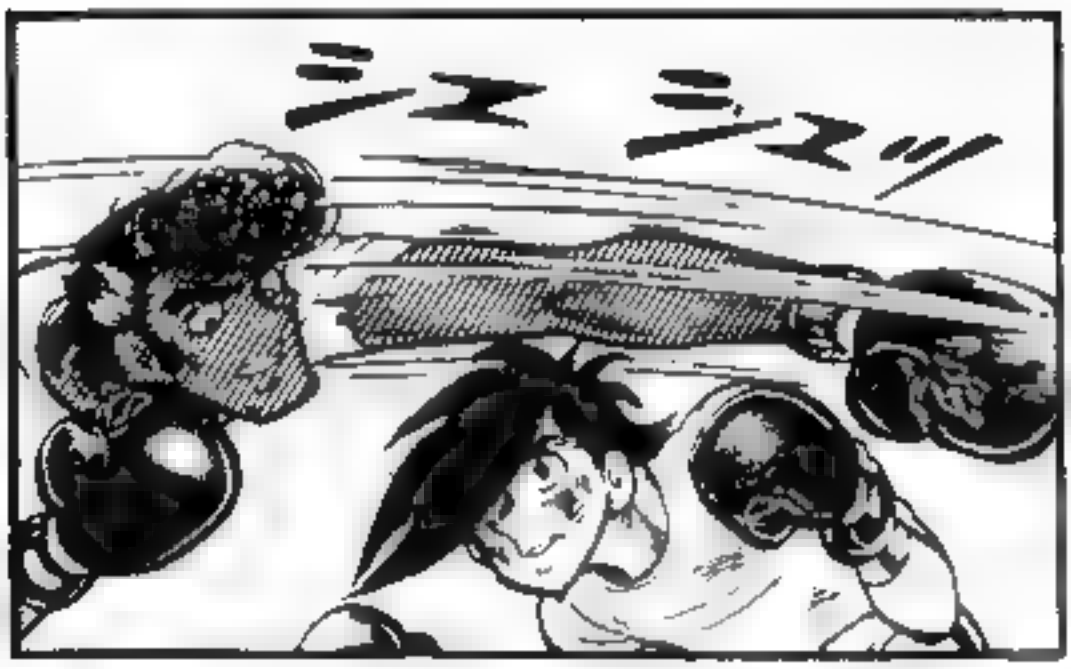
YOU SURE DO LIVE UP TO YOUR REPUTATION AS VENEZUELA'S TERROR IN BOTH SPEED AND POWER.

I'M STARTIN' TO REALLY ENJOY THIS.

A FREE SPAR WITH NO REF OR TIMER TO INTERFERE WITH US...

I'M FALLING FOR YOU ALL OVER AGAIN.

HERE I COME!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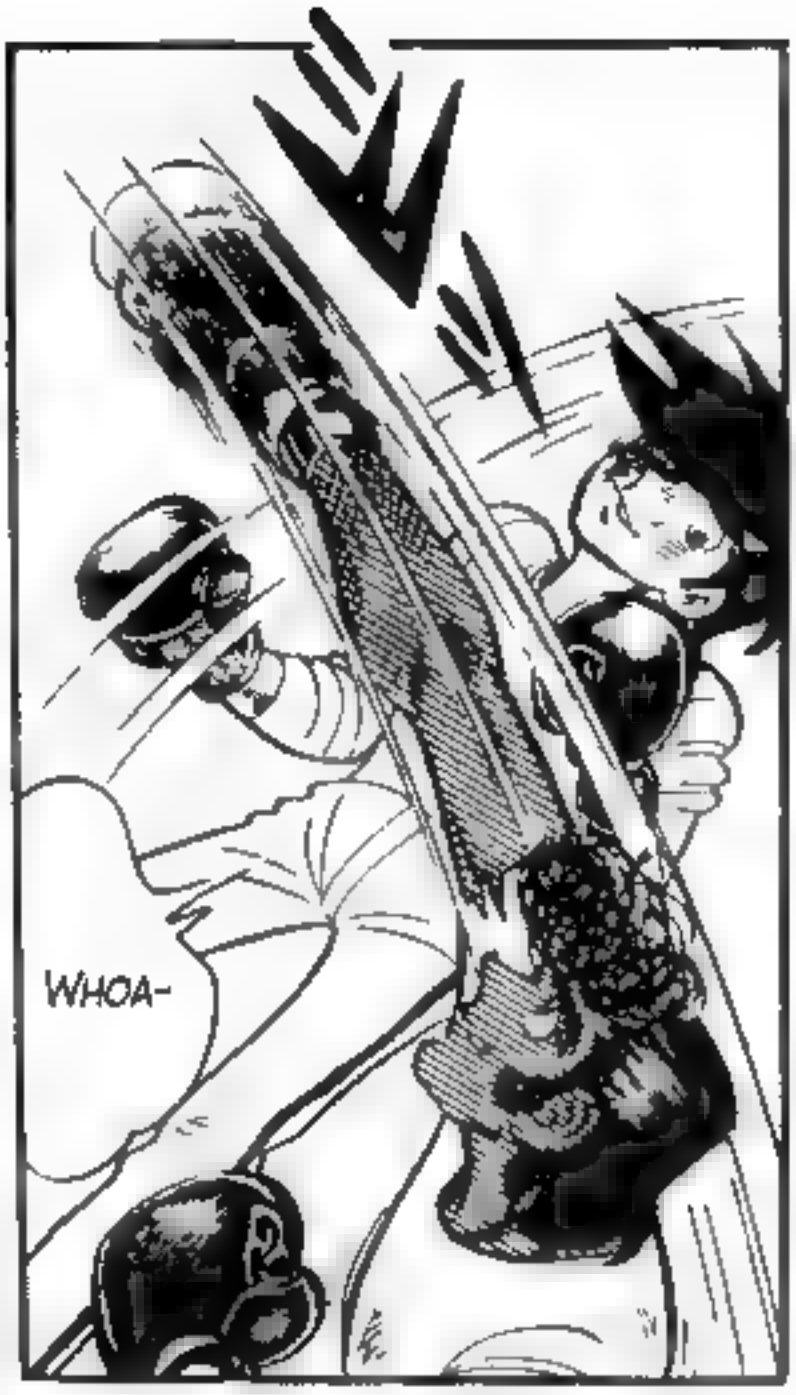
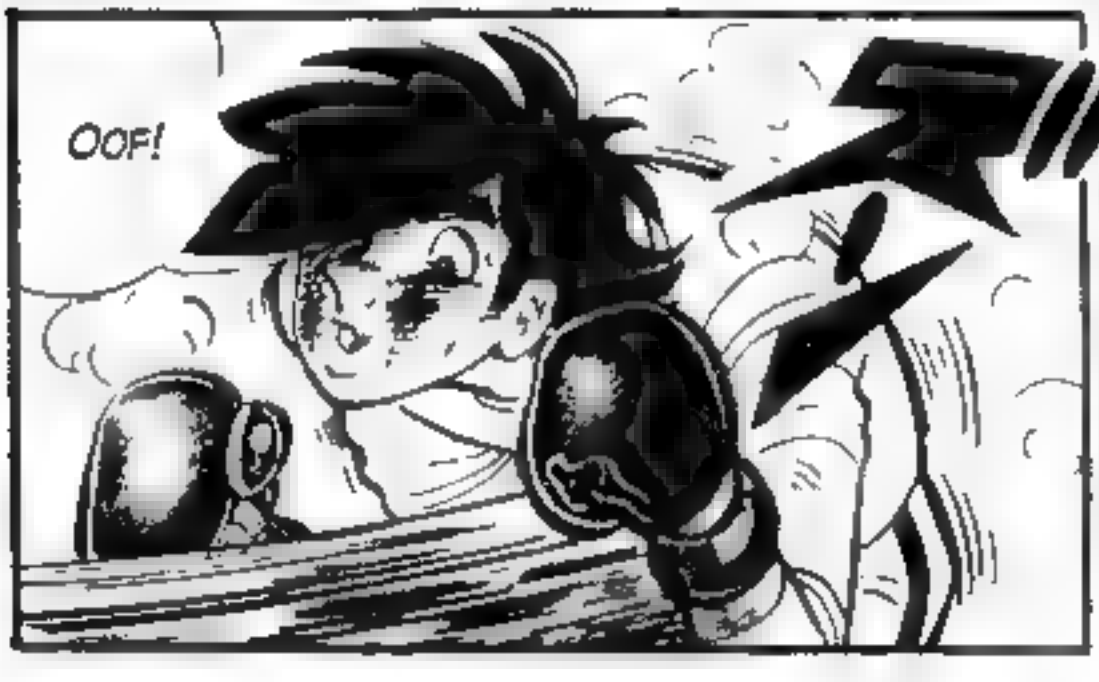

WHOA-

TAKE THIS!


OOF!

OOF

WHY YOU...

USE YOUR LEGS, JOE!

YOUR LEGS!

DRIVE IN RIGHT THERE AND ALTERNATE BETWEEN HIGH AND LOW BLOWS!

THAT'S IT!

AH-

AREN'T YOU GONNA STOP THEM!?

WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH YOU?

HOW DO YOU LIKE THIS!?

YOUR LEFT!

BOTH OF THEM ARE GOING FULL-OUT TO SEE WHO CAN KO THE OTHER FIRST!

THIS HAS CLEARLY GONE BEYOND A SIMPLE SPAR.

AH! THE RIGHT! GIVE HIM A RIGHT UPPERCUT!

UMM ...

YOU DON'T HAVE TO TELL ME! I ALREADY KNOW!

OOF...

HOW COULD YOU LET HIM FIGHT LIKE THIS WITH THE MATCH COMING UP SO SOON-

OH, PUT A SOCK IN IT!

JUST LOOK AT THE LIGHT IN HIS EYES!

MORE IMPORTANTLY, JUST LOOK HOW LIVELY JOE IS RIGHT NOW!

AND HEAR THE ROAR COMING FROM HIS HEART!

WELL, NISHI!?

HAVE YOU SEEN JOE FIGHT THIS WELL AS OF LATE!?

HIS RIGHT AND LEFT ARMS ARE FAST AS LIGHTNING AND HIS FEET ARE SWIFTLY SLIDING ACROSS THE RING!

HE'S NOT FARING WELL AT ALL...

WHAT LIGHT IN HIS EYES?

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A-AHHH...

AH!

THE TIDE'S TURNED WHILE YOU WERE SPOUTING ALL THAT STUFF...

I KNEW THIS WOULD HAPPEN...

SEE WHAT I MEAN! AT THIS RATE, JOE'S NOT EVEN GONNA BE ABLE TO STAND UP ON THE DAY OF HIS FIGHT!

GAHHH!

HAHHH!

T-
THAT'S IT, JOE!

YOU CAN DO IT!

REGAINING HIS WILDNESS...

AHH... YABUKI IS...

HAS IT BEEN SINCE I LAST SAW HIM FIGHT SO FEROCIOUSLY LIKE A WILD BEAST...

HOW MANY YEARS,

WHAT?

C'MON!

JOE!
JOE!
JOE!

HE'S LIKE AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT PERSON RIGHT NOW...!

I'VE NEVER SEEN THIS SIDE OF CARLOS BEFORE EITHER.

SPEAKING OF WHICH...

ONLY A TRUE VIRTUOSO CAN BRING OUT ITS TRUE QUALITY...

BUT ITS SUBLIME SOUND CAN'T BE BROUGHT OUT BY ANY VIOLINIST.

FOR VIOLINS, THE STRADIVARIUS IS PRIZED BEYOND ALL...

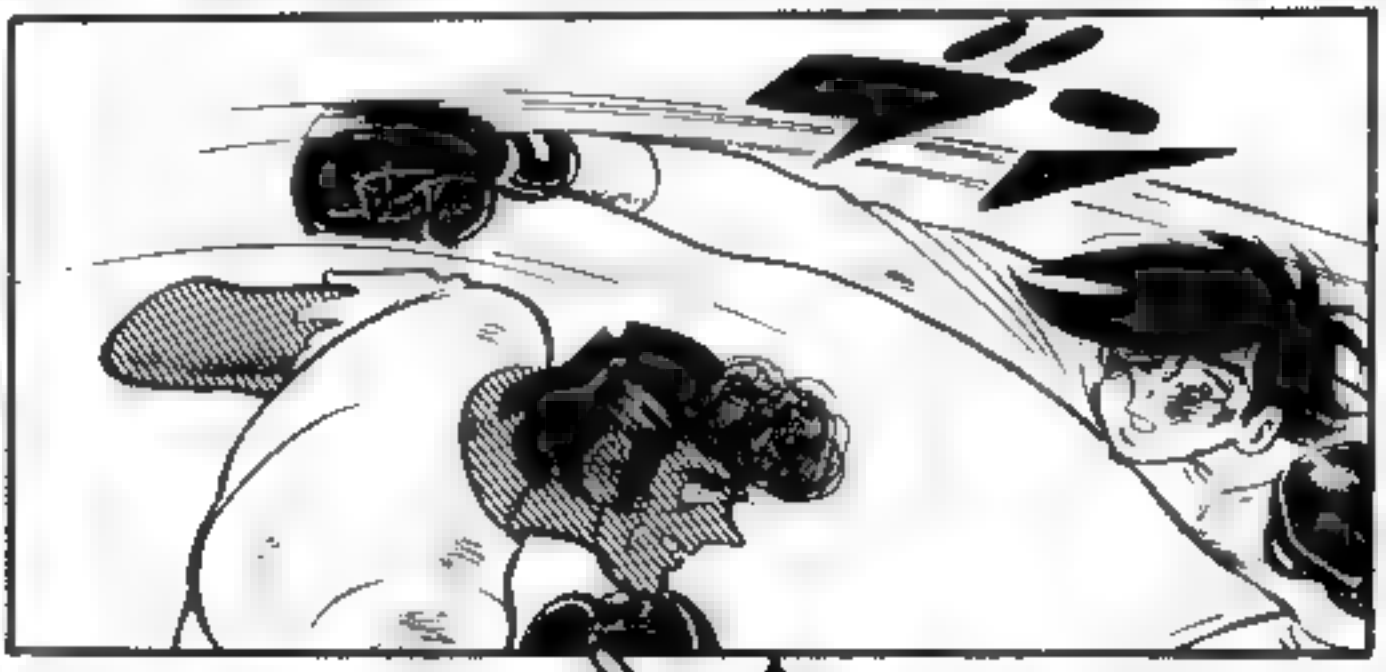
HUFF...

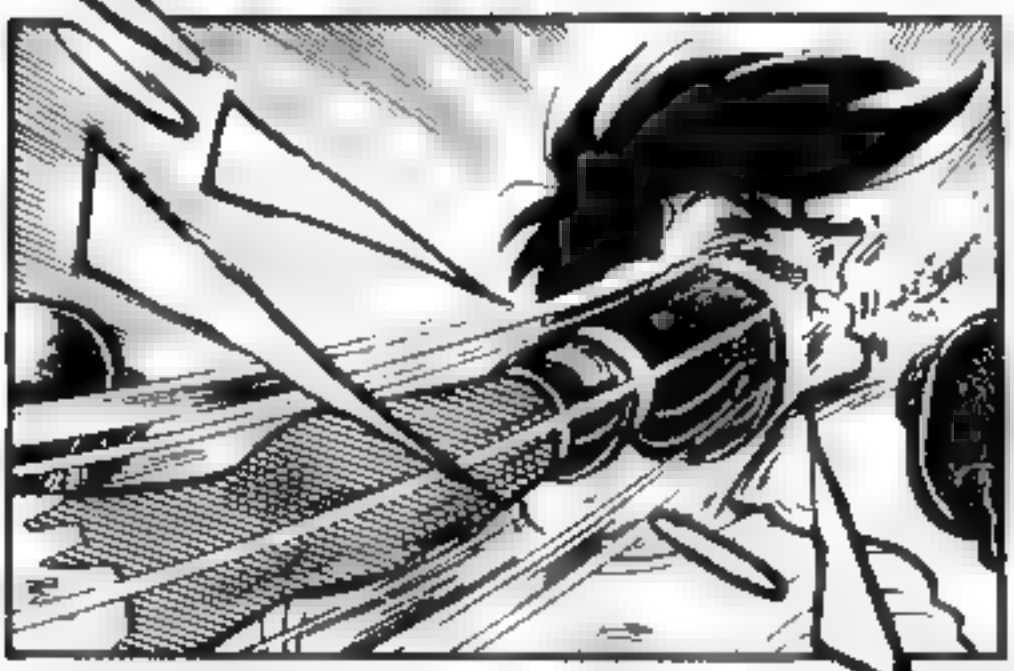
HUFF

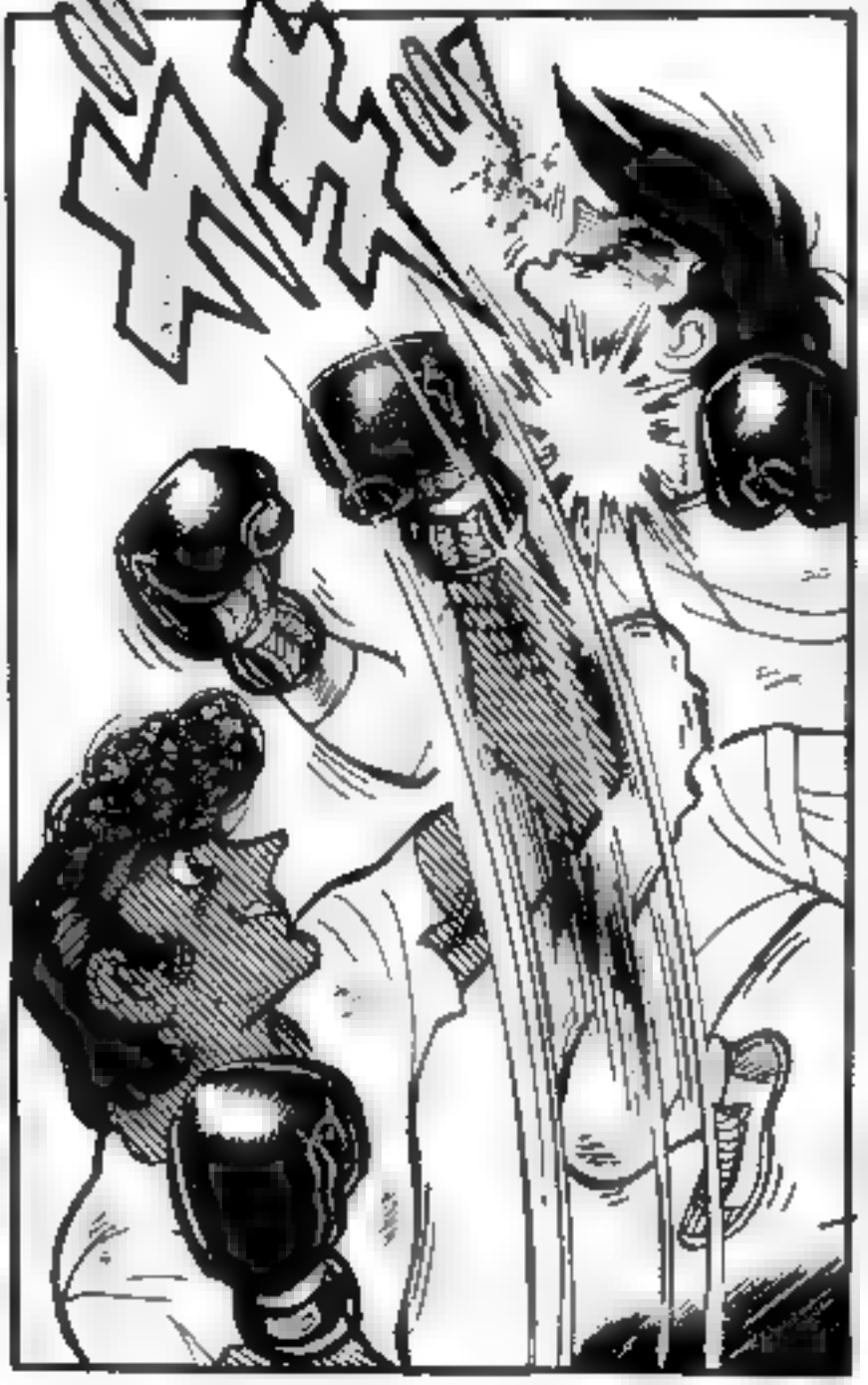
HUFF

MUST HAVE BEEN FAR TOO BENEATH YABUKI JOE TO LIGHT HIS FIRE, WHO HAD JUST FOUGHT WITH RIKIISHI TOORU.

IN SHORT, THE LIKES OF TIGER OZAKI OR NANGOU HARAJIMA,







HAH...

AGHH-

WHEN OUR MATCH IS SO CLOSE.

DON'T TRY TO SNEAK IN AN ELBOW,

WHOA-

YOU WOULDN'T REALLY WANT ME TO SIT OUT THE FIGHT BECAUSE OF ANY SERIOUS INJURIES NOW, WOULD YOU?

H-HEY, COME ON! GIVE ME A BREAK.

COME ON THEN. I'LL TAKE ANYTHING YOU'VE GOT, EVEN YOUR ELBOW BLOWS!

BUT IF THAT'S HOW YOU WANNA PLAY IT, THEN I'VE GOT MY OWN IDEA TOO.

HEH.

ユサー

HOW'RE YOU GONNA COUNTER MY PETTY STRATEGY?

SO SHOW ME THEN.

YEAH, YEAH.

I DON'T CARE IF YOU'RE ON ROPES ANYMORE.

I... TOLD YOU I HAVE WAY TO COUNTER YOUR PETTY ROPE TACTIC, DIDN'T I?

NO.

WHAT SHOULD I DO, ROBERT?

WELL...? WHAT'S THE MATTER?

THAT'S A WRAP.

THIS SPAR'S GONE ON LONG ENOUGH.

WAS ALL THAT TALK A BLUFF?

W-WAIT, YOU'RE QUITTING IN THE MIDDLE OF THE FIGHT!?

LET'S RETURN TO THE HOTEL AND TAKE A NICE REST, EH CARLOS?

THERE, NOW YOU'VE REPAID YABUKI FOR BEING YOUR SPARRING PARTNER ONCE.

NOW I'M GETTIN' REAL SUSPICIOUS ABOUT YOUR COUNTER TO THE ROPES!

SURE, NICE EXCUSE.

IT'S ONLY NATURAL FOR A MANAGER TO PUT A STOP TO THIS ABSURD PRETENSE FOR A SPAR.

IN OTHER WORDS, YOU TWO WERE ALREADY WELL INTO THE 2ND ROUND WITHOUT EVEN TAKING A BREAK.

YOU'VE ALREADY BEEN FIGHTING FOR 3 MINUTES AND 40 SECONDS.

ONLY STICK TO YOUR BACK LIKE IRON POLE...!

WILL BE STIFF AS IRON AND WON'T BOUNCE AT ALL...

THE ROPES YOU CLING FOR SAFETY,

I SAY ONE THING BEFORE LEAVING TODAY. IN OUR FIGHT AT KOURAKUEN BASEBALL FIELD,

HAHA.

WHAT, THE ROPES ...?

AN IRON POLE...?

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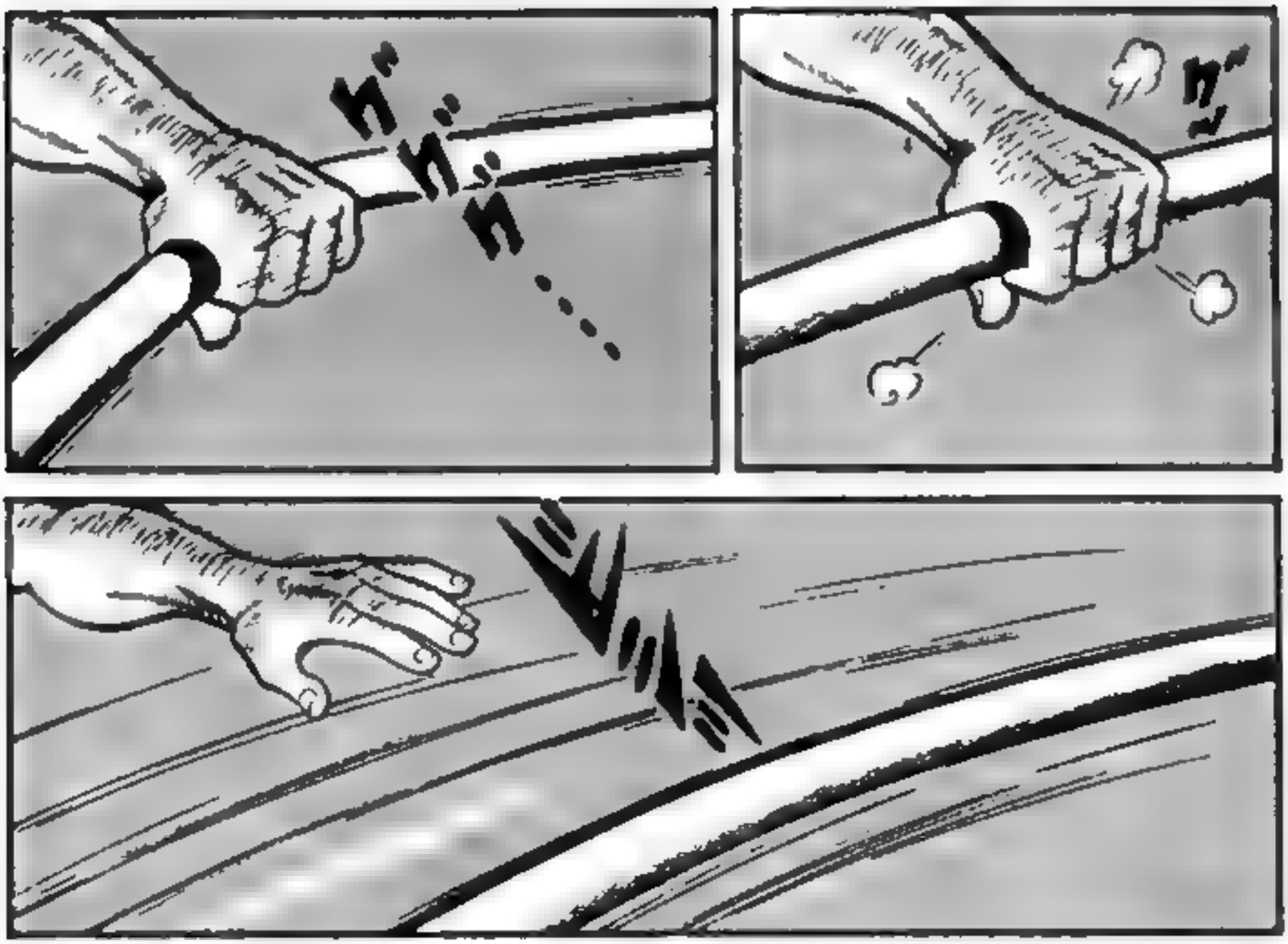
HA
MAKE A SPRINGY ROPE LIKE THIS STIFF AS AN IRON POLE?
WHAT A LOAD OF COCKAMAMIE!

MAYBE THOSE TWO HAVE LOST THEIR MARBLES AFTER YOUR PERFORMANCE LAST MATCH KNOCKED THEM OFF THEIR FEET.
WELL?

A CHEAP BLUFF, IN SHORT.
I'M SURE IT'S NOTHING MORE THAN A DRAMATIC GESTURE.
THEY MUST BE TRYING TO GET US ALL NERVOUS AS MUCH AS THEY CAN TO GIVE THEMSELVES EVEN THE TINIEST BIT OF ADVANTAGE FOR THIS COMING MATCH WHICH THEY HAD NEVER INTENDED TO HAPPEN!

THEY MUST BE BLUFFIN', RIGHT!?

DON'T YOU THINK SO TOO, JOE?

THEY'RE FULL OF HOT-WIND, I TELL YOU WHAT!

BUNCH OF CON-ARTISTS.

IF ONLY THAT WERE TRUE...

HOW RELIEVED I'D BE,

BUT THIS IS CARLOS WE'RE TALKING ABOUT.

WHO KNOWS...

Y... YOU MEAN TO SAY THAT HE'S REALLY GONNA SOMEHOW TURN THAT ROPE INTO AN IRON BAR...?

T-THEN YOU DON'T THINK SO?

IF IT WERE ANY OTHER PERSON THAT SAID SOMETHING LIKE THAT, I'D ALSO THINK HE WAS TRYING TO SCARE OR PSYCHE ME OUT...

STOP MOVING.
A LITTLE MORE...
RIGHT...
SO I THINK IT'S BETTER TO TAKE HIS WORDS AT FACE-VALUE.
BUT CARLOS RIVERA HIMSELF CLEARLY STATED IN NO UNCERTAIN TERMS,
THANKS.
ALL DONE.
HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU HAVE TO REPEAT YOURSELF UNTIL YOU'RE SATISFIED?
OH, PUT A SOCK IN IT ALREADY.
WHAT COULD HE POSSIBLY DO TO THE ROPES...
HMM...
. . . .
LET HIM.
IF HE'S GONNA MAKE THE ROPES STIFF AS IRON, THEN FINE.
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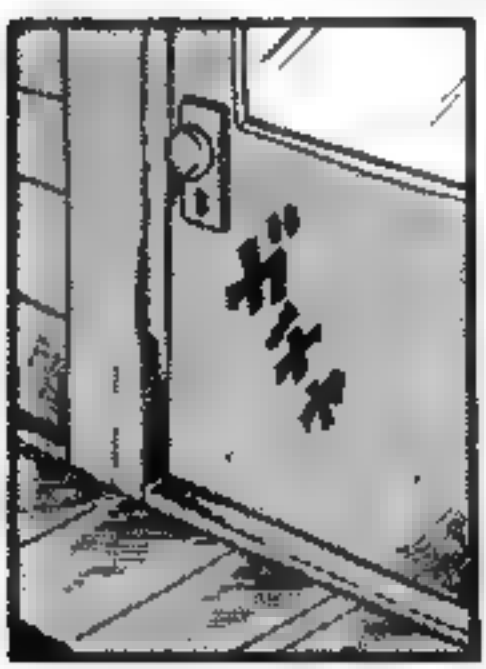
OH-

NISHI...

BUT WE GOT WORK EARLY TOMORROW SO WE HAVE TO GET GOING...

SORRY, OLD MAN.



IT'S ALMOST THE DAY OF THE MATCH SO YOU GUYS SHOULDN'T PUSH YOURSELVES TOO HARD EITHER.
NIGHT. GIVE MY REGARDS TO YOUR FATHER AS WELL.
GOOD NIGHT.

THERE'S NO REAL POINT IN US RACKING OUR BRAINS OVER WHAT THEY SAID.
WELL... I SUPPOSE YOU'RE RIGHT.

...Y

YOU FOUGHT HIM HEAD-ON AT THE CENTER OF THE RING WITH 6 OZ GLOVES AND FARED PRETTY WELL.

EVEN DURING THE SPAR TODAY,

AM I RIGHT?

AND JUST DISH IT OUT AT THE CENTER OF THE RING.

IN THAT CASE, IT'S PROBABLY BETTER TO ALTOGETHER ABANDON AN UNPOPULAR TACTIC LIKE CLINGING TO THE ROPES,

AHAHAHA!

HA...

YOU MIGHT EVEN BE ABLE TO TAKE CARLOS' PLACE AND FIGHT AN ACTUAL WORLD TITLE-MATCH!

THEN JUST GETTING INTO THE WORLD RANKINGS WON'T BE OUR CONCERN ANYMORE!

IF CARLOS HAPPENS TO SLIP UP AND YOU KNOCK HIM OUT...

A-AND...

HEAD OFF TO BED THEN.

DRUNK ALREADY?

IF YOU REALLY SAW THAT SPAR TODAY AS AN EVEN MATCH WITH SOBER EYES, THEN I'D SAY YOU NEED TO GET YOUR EYES CHECKED OUT.

WELL, YOU SURE ARE QUITE OFF THE MARK FOR A SOBER MAN THEN.

DON'T TAKE ME FOR A DRUNKEN IDIOT!

I AIN'T DRUNK YET!

BUT I GET THE FEELING THAT HE NEVER THREW A REAL, SERIOUS PUNCH AT ME YET.

MAYBE I'M MISTAKEN,

W-WHAT WAS THAT!?

WHO KNOWS, MAYBE EVEN YOUR OTHER EYE ALSO NEEDS AN EYE-PATCH.

WHA...

AS WELL AS THE FIRST TIME WE SPARRED...

AND NOT JUST TODAY, EITHER. I'M TALKING ABOUT THE EXHIBITION MATCH,

I'D SAY HE'S STILL ONLY SHOWING ABOUT 80%.

IT FEELS LIKE HE'S STILL HOLDING BACK JUST A BIT.

EVEN THOUGH I'M GIVING IT MY ALL TO FIGURE OUT TO SIZE UP THIS GUY...

WHA...

I JUST CAN'T QUITE CATCH UP TO HIM.

HIS POTENTIAL'S AS ELUSIVE AS EVER.

WOULD I BE MAKING SUCH A GRIM EXPRESSION IF I WERE JOKING?

SOME SORT OF JOKE ON ME...?

IS... IS THIS... SUPPOSED TO BE,

AND WHO'S BETTER THAN CARLOS TO GIVE ME THAT EXTRA PUSH?

I THINK THAT WHEN PUSH COMES TO SHOVE, THERE'LL STILL BE A LOT MORE I CAN PULL FROM MYSELF AS WELL.

...HAHA, BUT I'LL SAY THIS THOUGH. MY EFFORTS WEREN'T ALL IN VAIN.

SLOWLY BUT STEADILY MAKING ITS WAY TO SOME-THING...

LIKE A LIT FUSE,

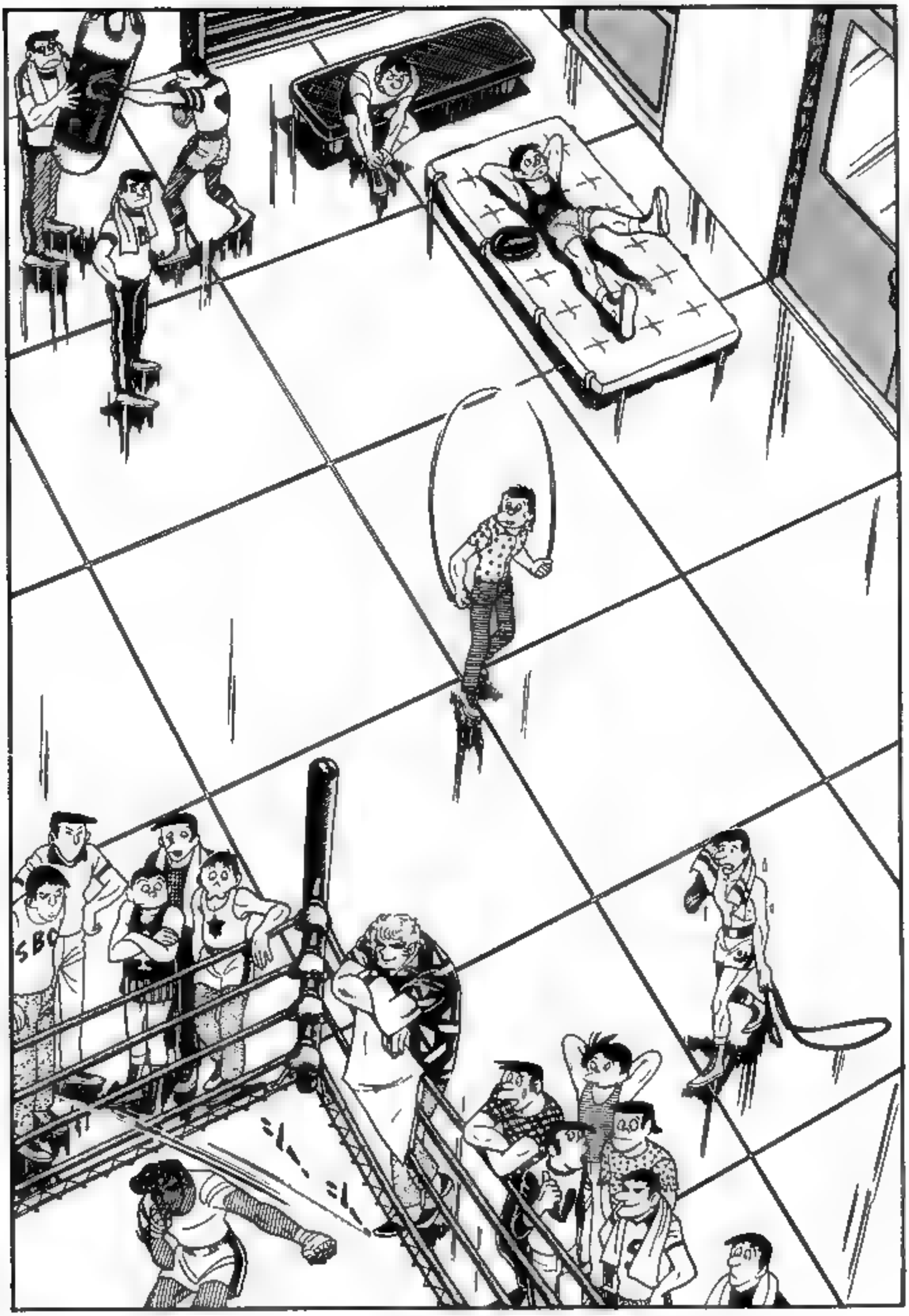
THERE'S A SMALL LIGHT THAT'S JUST STARTED.

RIGHT NOW, SOMEWHERE DEEP INSIDE ME...

J-JOE...

HAHAHA...

WHETHER THAT LIT FUSE LEADS ME TO A BOMB WHICH'LL DESTROY ME IF I'M NOT CAREFUL IS ANOTHER MATTER THOUGH.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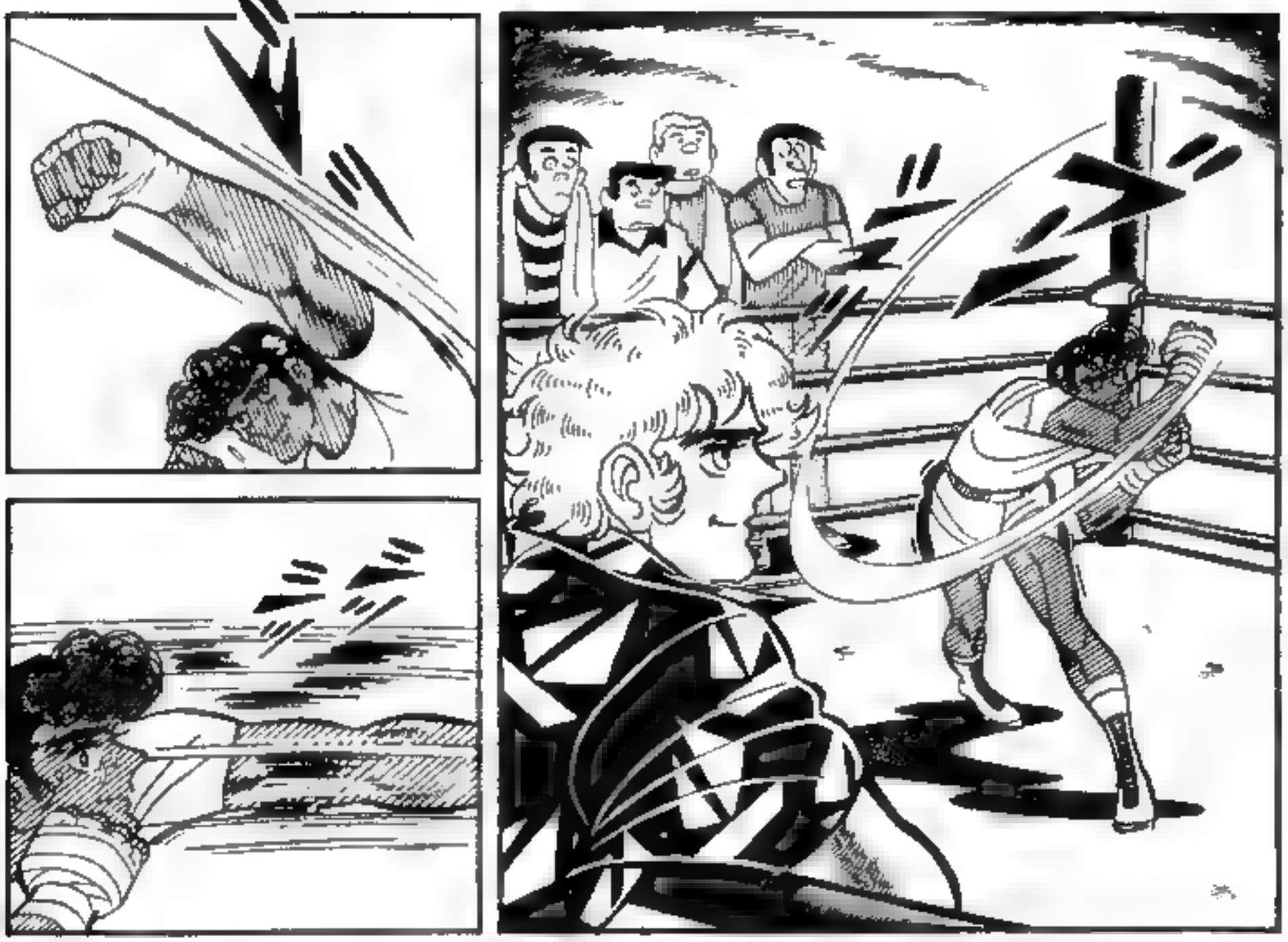
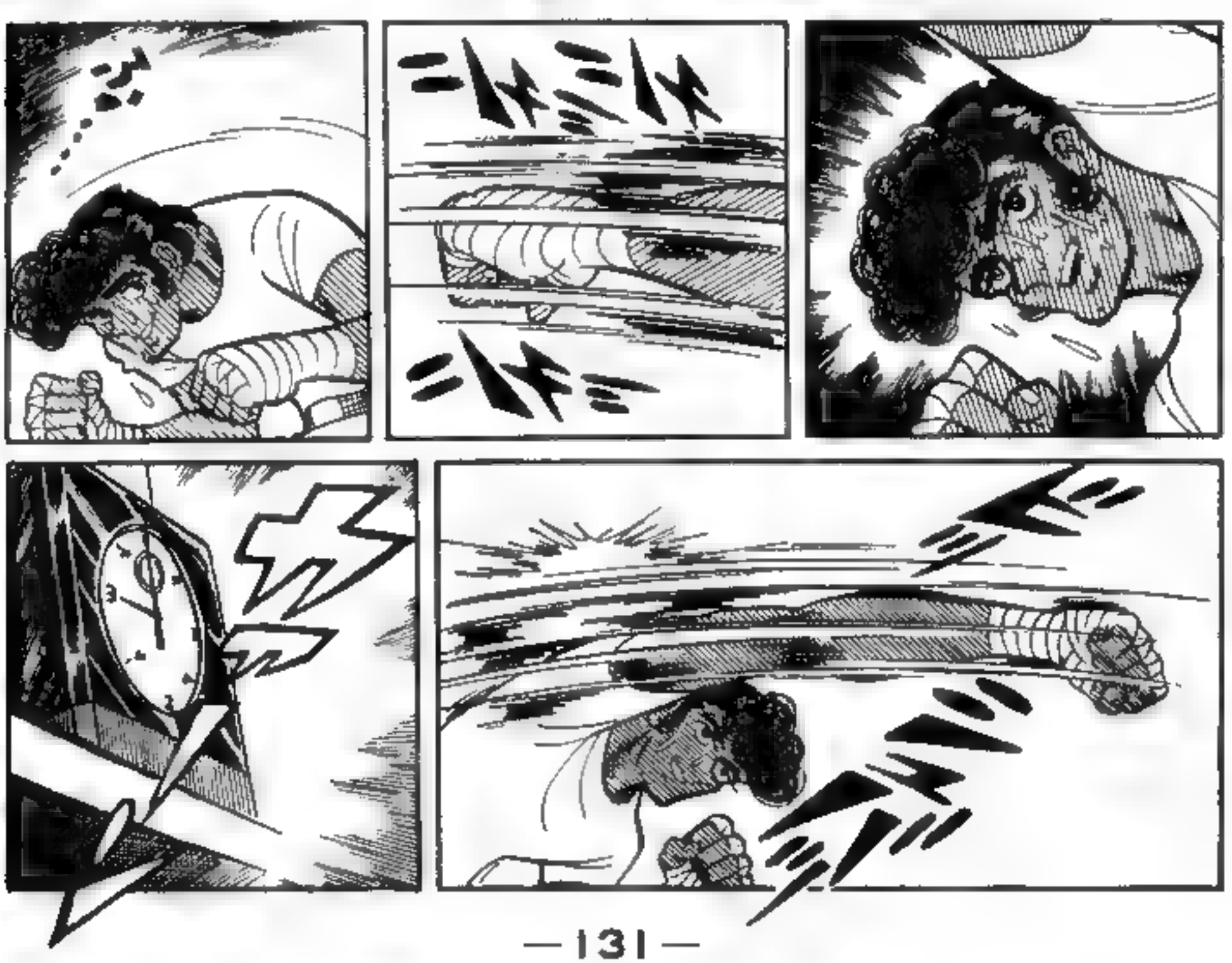




RIGHT!

LET'S CALL THAT A DAY, CARLOS.

GOOD, THAT'S ENOUGH!

WELL ISN'T THIS QUITE THE RELAXED ATMOSPHERE.

OF COURSE, EASY PICKINGS. HAHA...

NO WORRIES, VICTORY WILL BE YOURS FOR SURE.

BY "EASY PICKINGS," ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT YOUR UPCOMING FIGHT WITH YABUKI JOE?

MUCH HIGHER? . . .

WE'VE ALREADY MOVED PAST HIM AND ARE NOW AIMING MUCH HIGHER, MS. YOUKO!

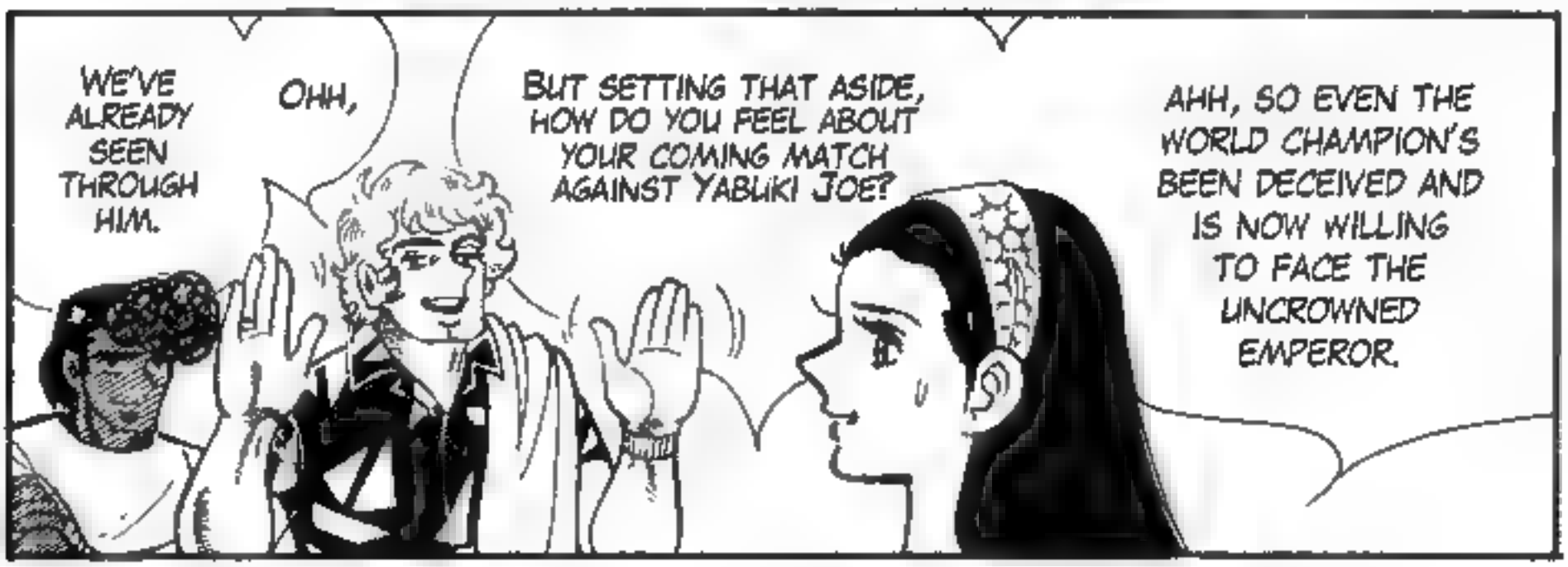
OH NO, NO. WE WEREN'T TALKING ABOUT HIM.

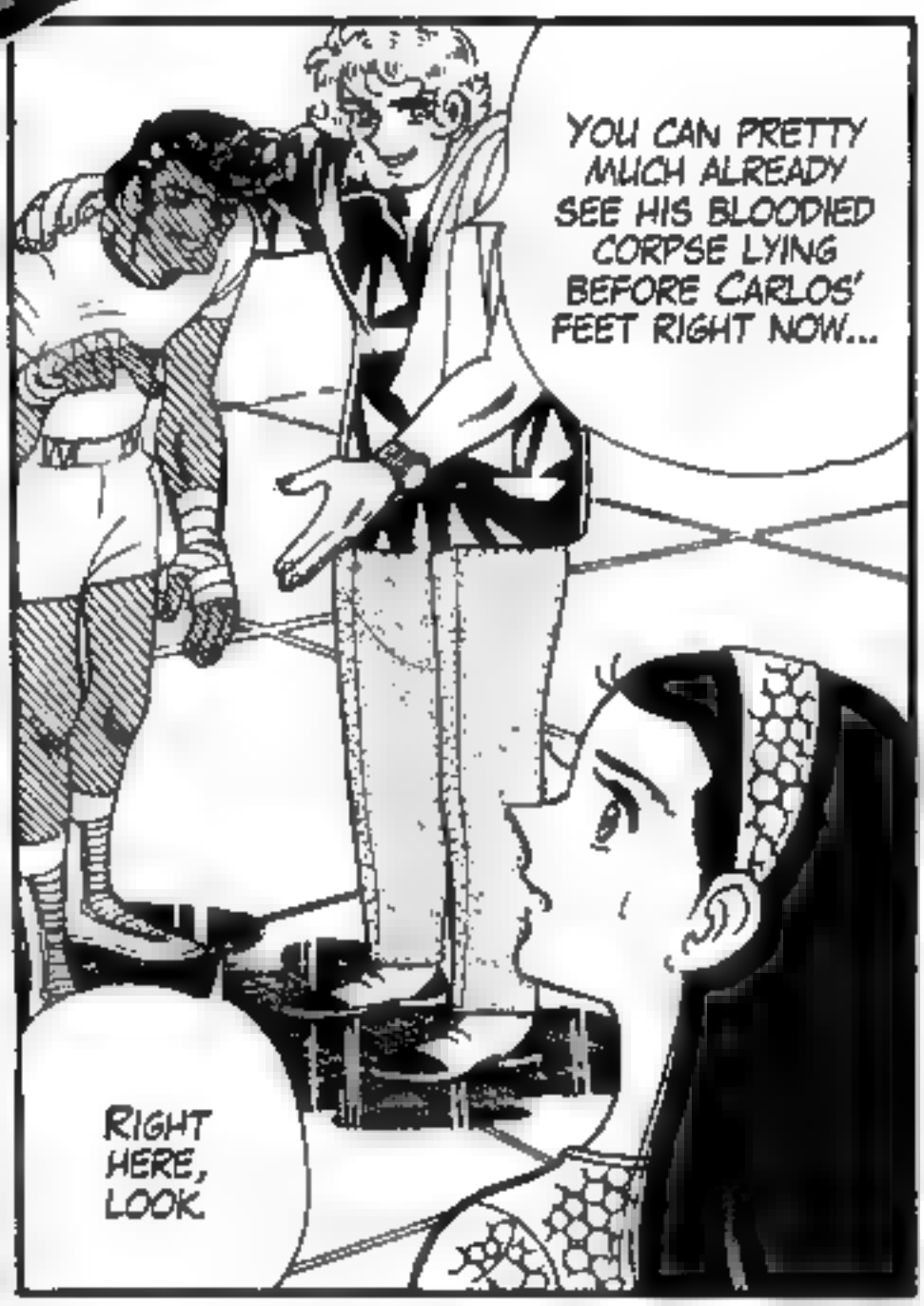
YABUKI ...?

FOR THIS FORTUNATE TURN OF EVENTS, MS. YOUKO.
WE HAVE ONLY YOU TO THANK,

IF YOU'VE ALREADY MOVED FAR BEYOND YABUKI JOE, MAY I ASK WHAT ALL THIS TRAINING IS FOR?
THIS IS ALL TRAINING TO PREPARE CARLOS FOR HIS SHOT AT THE WORLD CHAMPION!
FOR THE WORLD TITLE-MATCH, OF COURSE!

THANKS TO RIVERA'S STAGED PERFORMANCE IN THOSE, AND THE FACT THAT HE'S STILL "STRUGGLING" TO SETTLE THINGS WITH A FIGHTER WHO'S NOT EVEN ON THE JAPANESE RANKING, THE WORLD CHAMPION HAS FINALLY CONSENTED TO FIGHT WITH CARLOS.
EXACTLY! IT'S ALL THANKS TO YOUR BRILLIANT IDEA OF FIGHTING AGAINST THE BANTAMWEIGHT RANKERS IN THIS COUNTRY.


WE'VE ALREADY SEEN THROUGH HIM.
OHH,
BUT SETTING THAT ASIDE, HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT YOUR COMING MATCH AGAINST YABUKI JOE?
AHH, SO EVEN THE WORLD CHAMPION'S BEEN DECEIVED AND IS NOW WILLING TO FACE THE UNCROWNED EMPEROR.


YOU CAN PRETTY MUCH ALREADY SEE HIS BLOODIED CORPSE LYING BEFORE CARLOS' FEET RIGHT NOW...
RIGHT HERE, LOOK.

THERE'S NEVER BEEN A BOXER TO TAKE MY KILLER PUNCHES FOR 3 FULL ROUNDS.
I WONDER IF IT'S ALRIGHT TO LOOK DOWN UPON HIM SO MUCH, CONSIDERING HOW DESPERATELY DETERMINED HE'LL BE...
AWFULLY CONFIDENT, AREN'T YOU

BUT HAVEN'T YOU COME ACROSS CONSIDERABLE CHALLENGES IN FACING YABUKI?
I CERTAINLY RECOGNIZE YOUR SKILLS, CARLOS,

THIS IS THE TRUTH!
YES, ZERO.
EXACTLY. NOT IN THE BANTAMWEIGHTS NOR THE FEATHER WEIGHTS IN ALL OF THE WORLD.

IN THE EXHIBITION MATCH,

T-THEN LET ME ASK YOU ONE THING.

AM I WRONG?

OTHERWISE, HOW WOULD YOU HAVE EVER SECURED THE KOURAKUEN BASEBALL STADIUM AS THE VENUE FOR THE NEXT FIGHT?

HAHA... WELL OF COURSE WE MADE IT *APPEAR* THAT WAY.

DID CARLOS NOT BECOME SERIOUS AFTER TAKING ONE OF JOE'S COUNTER?

AND WHAT ABOUT THE FIRST TIME THE TWO SPARRED IN MY GYM?

HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN CARLOS' FRANTIC CALLS WHEN YABUKI WAS LEAVING, SHORTLY FOLLOWING HIS DISQUALIFICATION?

COME BACK!

COME BACK, JOE!

OHH...

WAS YOUR RESOLUTE EXPRESSION BACK THEN ALL FOR NOTHING AS WELL?

EVEN YESTERDAY, THERE WERE TIMES WHEN YOU WERE PUSHED BACK BY JOE AND EVEN SUFFERED A DOWN.

THERE'S NO MORE NEED FOR ACTING.

THIS NEXT FIGHT WITH YABUKI WILL BE MY LAST FIGHT HERE FOR GOOD.

I DON'T BLAME YOU, HOWEVER. DESPITE HAVING WORKED FOR YEARS WITH HIM, I ADMIT THERE ARE TIMES WHEN EVEN I'M FOOLED BY HIS WAYS, HAHA...

IT SEEMS YOU'VE FORGOTTEN THAT CARLOS' ACTING SKILLS ARE ONLY SECOND TO HIS BOXING SKILLS.

I HOPE YOU'LL WATCH IT.

AND I WILL SAY MY FAREWELL TO HIM AT KOURAKUEN FIELD AS THE TRUE CARLOS RIVERA.

I'M SO CONFUSED I CAN HARDLY THINK STRAIGHT...!

ARE CARLOS AND HIS MANAGER, ROBERT...?

J-JUST WHAT KIND OF PEOPLE...

ギリスポーツ

IGHT OF THE CENTORY TONIGHT!

The bell will ring tonight at Kourakuen Baseball Field

Brawler Joe's all geared up for tonight!

The merry Carlos expresses his comfortable confidence.

YOU THERE. NEED ANY RINGSIDE TICKETS?
NO POINT IN GOING TO THE TICKET BOOTHS. THEY'RE ALL SOLD OUT, DON'T YOU KNOW?

HEH HEH. THESE SEATS WERE SOLD AT 8000 YEN BUT I'M AFRAID I CAN'T PART WITH THEM FOR ANY LESS THAN 25,000.
WHO WANTS TICKETS!?
YOU WANT SOME REAL GOOD SEATS, MISTER...?

IT'S RIGHT THIS WAY.

PLEASE HEAD TO THE 1ST BASE AREA.

LET'S SEE... PLEASE MAKE YOUR WAY TO THE 3RD BASE AREA.

PLEASE LINE UP IN AN ORDERLY FASHION!

PLEASE DO NOT PUSH!

AND THERE IS TO BE NO LOITERING IN THE HALLWAYS!

OWW!

I WANT A BEER OVER HERE!

GET YOUR SANDWICH LUNCHBOXES RIGHT HERE!

WHO NEEDS COKE? ANYBODY?

I SAID I WANT A BEER OVER HERE!

I'LL TAKE A SANDWICH LUNCHBOX HERE!

AND HOW MUCH FOR THE COKE?

WOULD YOU LOOK AT THE CROWD TONIGHT!

OH MAN...

T.V

WELL, THE HEAVYWEIGHT WORLD TITLE-MATCH BETWEEN THE AMERICAN BOXERS JACK DEMPSEY AND GENE TUNNEY HELD IN SEPT 23 OF 1926 HOLDS THE INCREDIBLE RECORD FOR DRAWING A CROWD OF OVER 120,000.

BUT IN TODAY'S AGE WHERE FIGHTS ARE COMMONLY BROADCASTED TO EVERY TELEVISION SET, 37,000 IS INDEED AN ENORMOUS CROWD.

TRULY A FITTING ATMOSPHERE FOR WHAT THE MEDIA'S BEEN CALLING THE MATCH OF THE CENTURY.

THE TICKET OFFICE REPORTS THAT THEY'VE SOLD OVER 37,000 TICKETS.

WELL, IT HAS TO DO WITH THE STATUS OF THE FIGHTERS.

AND... WHY IS THAT?

BUT HARDLY THE SAME CAN BE SAID OF YABUKI JOE, WHO'S NOT EVEN RANKED IN THE JAPANESE BANTAMWEIGHT DIVISION.

CARLOS RIVERA, AS 6TH IN THE WORLD, IS CERTAINLY AN APPROPRIATE BOXER FOR A MATCH BILLED AS THE FIGHT OF THE CENTURY,

YES, I WAS JUST ABOUT TO GET TO THAT.

BUT THEN HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN THE LARGE GATHERING TONIGHT, USUALLY APPROPRIATE FOR ONLY WORLD TITLE MATCHES AND THE LIKE?

I SEE,

BUT EVEN SO, I THINK CALLING THIS THE "FIGHT OF THE CENTURY" IS RATHER EXAGGERATED, WOULDN'T YOU AGREE?

THIS IS A FIGHT BETWEEN TWO HALF-NAKED MEN WHO'VE HONED THEIR PRIMAL INSTINCTS TO UTMOST PERFECTION.

YOU SEE, I HAVE A THEORY TO EXPLAIN THAT, WHICH CAN BE SUMMARIZED BY CALLING THIS NOT A "FIGHT OF THE CENTURY", BUT RATHER "STRUGGLE OF THIS CENTURY."

THESE TWO WILL BATTLE IT OUT IN THE VERY MIDDLE OF A MODERN-DAY CITY, WHICH CONSTANTLY SERVES TO RESTRAIN OUR PRIMAL URGES WITH ALL ITS LAWS AND REGULATIONS. SURELY, ANY MODERN-DAY MAN CAN FEEL A RUSH OF EXCITEMENT SURGE WITHIN HIM AT SUCH A SIGHT CONTRARY TO HIS SURROUNDINGS.

THE GRACEFUL PANTHER OF VENEZUELA VERSUS THE WILD DOG OF JAPAN.

IN OTHER WORDS, IT IS A NOSTALGIA FOR OUR PRIMEVAL LIVES.

HEY, LOOK.

AFTER ALL, WHERE ELSE CAN YOU SEE SUCH SANCTIONED VIOLENCE? THERE'S NO GUARANTEE THAT EITHER FIGHTER WILL LIVE TO SEE ANOTHER DAY!

A NOSTALGIA FOR OUR PRIMITIVE ROOTS. A SPLENDID EXPLANATION!

WELL?

HOW DO YOU FEEL AS THE PROMOTER WHO ARRANGED THIS SPECTACULAR SHOWDOWN AT KOURAKUEN STADIUM?

SO...

I HOPE YOU DON'T MIND ME ASKING YOU SOME QUESTIONS.

GOOD EVENING, MS. YOUKO. LOOKS LIKE THIS'LL BE A NIGHT TO REMEMBER!

AND JUST LOOK! ALL THE OTHER GYM OWNERS HAVE GATHERED AS WELL.

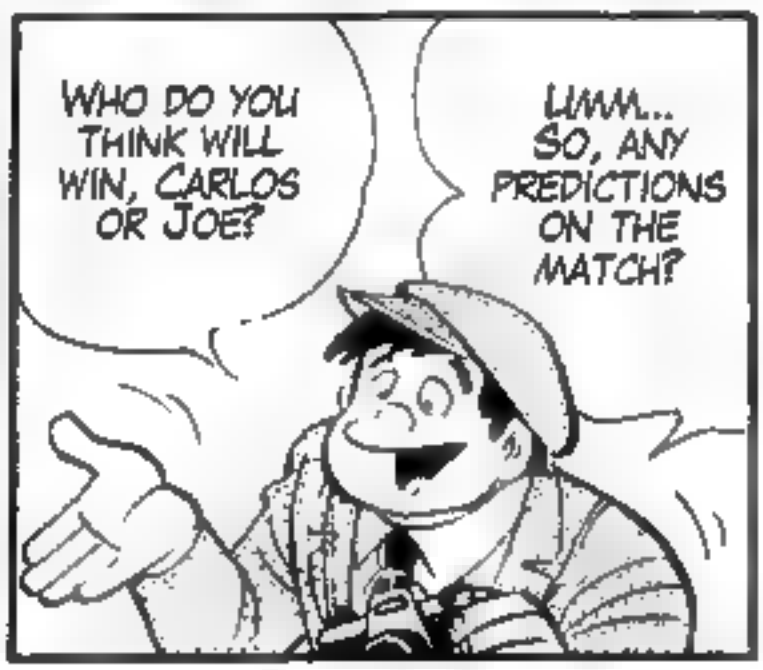
EVEN THOUGH THEY ALL LOOKED DOWN IN DERISION AND DISBELIEF WHEN THEY HEARD THAT KOURAKUEN BASEBALL STADIUM WAS TO BE USED AS THE VENUE, THEY'RE ALL JUST HOLDING THEIR BREATHS FOR THE FIGHT TO START ANYTIME NOW, HAHA.

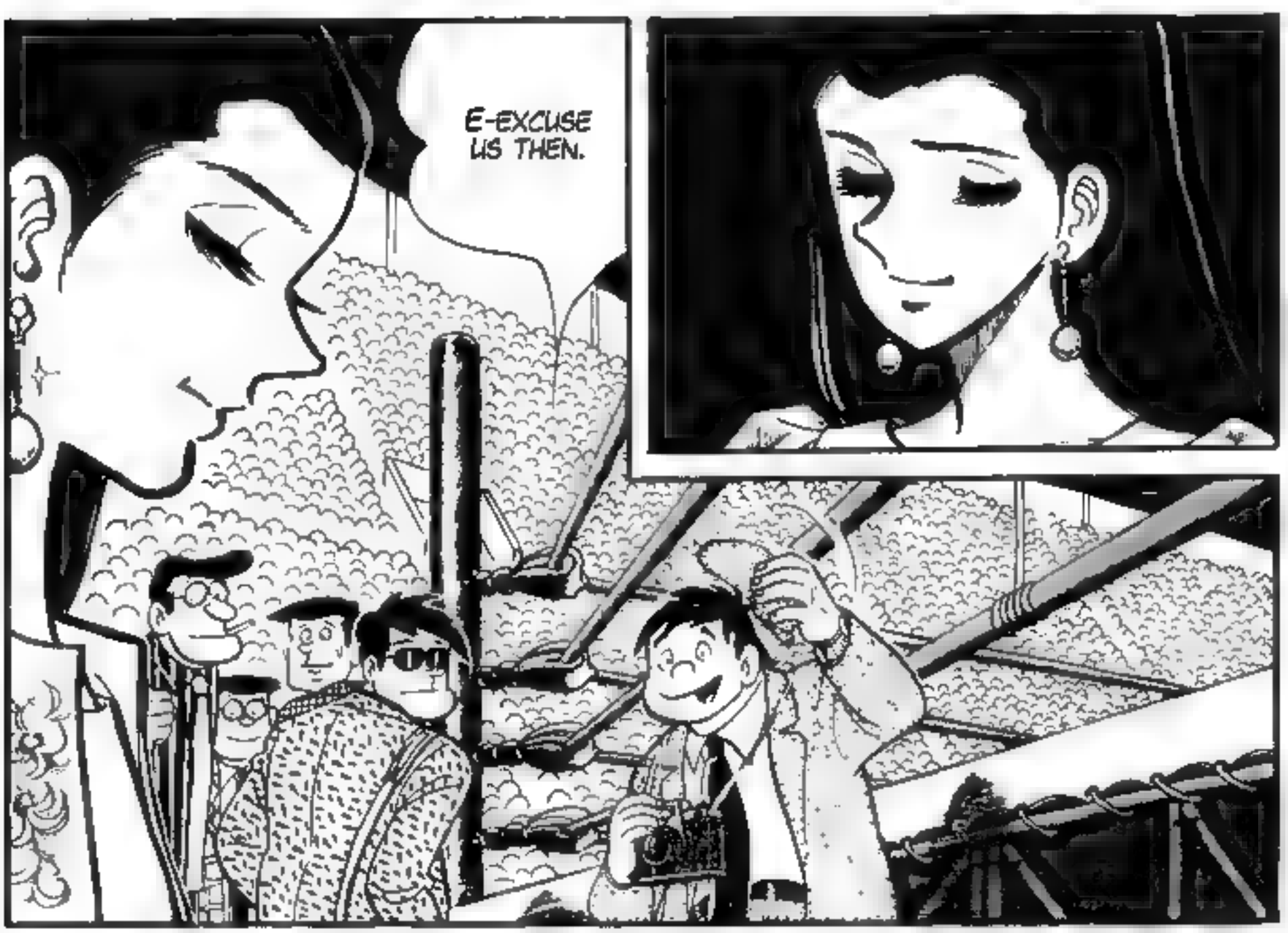
THOUGH THEN AGAIN, I SUPPOSE FOR A HEIRESS TO THE SHIRAKI ZAIBATSU, IT'S NOT AN OVERWHELMING AMOUNT EITHER, HAHA...

WITH SUCH A LARGE CROWD, I'M SURE YOU'LL BE TAKING QUITE THE HEFTY CUT NO MATTER HOW MUCH THE FIGHT MONEY YOU'LL BE PAYING TO BOTH FIGHTERS.

....

UMM... COULD WE JUST GET A WORD OR TWO?


WHO DO YOU THINK WILL WIN, CARLOS OR JOE?
UMM... SO, ANY PREDICTIONS ON THE MATCH?


E-EXCUSE US THEN.

I DON'T KNOW WHETHER TO CALL IT BEING MORE WOMANLY OR A SIGN OF FEMININE WEAKNESS,

SHE'S LOOKING DIFFERENT FROM HER USUAL CALM AND EVER-COLLECTED SELF THAT TALKS DOWN TO US REPORTERS.

TALK ABOUT STRANGE ...

I WONDER WHAT'S WRONG?

ALMOST LIKE A LITTLE GIRL WHO'S WANDERED INTO SEEING HER VERY FIRST BOXING MATCH.

BUT WHATEVER THE CASE, IT LOOKS LIKE SHE'S TIMIDLY CURLED HERSELF UP INTO A BALL...

A WORLD NO WOMAN WAS MEANT TO PENETRATE...

H... HAVE I PERHAPS DELVED TOO DEEPLY INTO A WORLD FIT ONLY FOR MEN...?

YES...

PERHAPS I AM.

HAHA... YOU'RE LIKE THE DEVIL.

LAYING DEVIOUS TRAPS TO ENSNARE ME TO DO YOUR BIDDING...

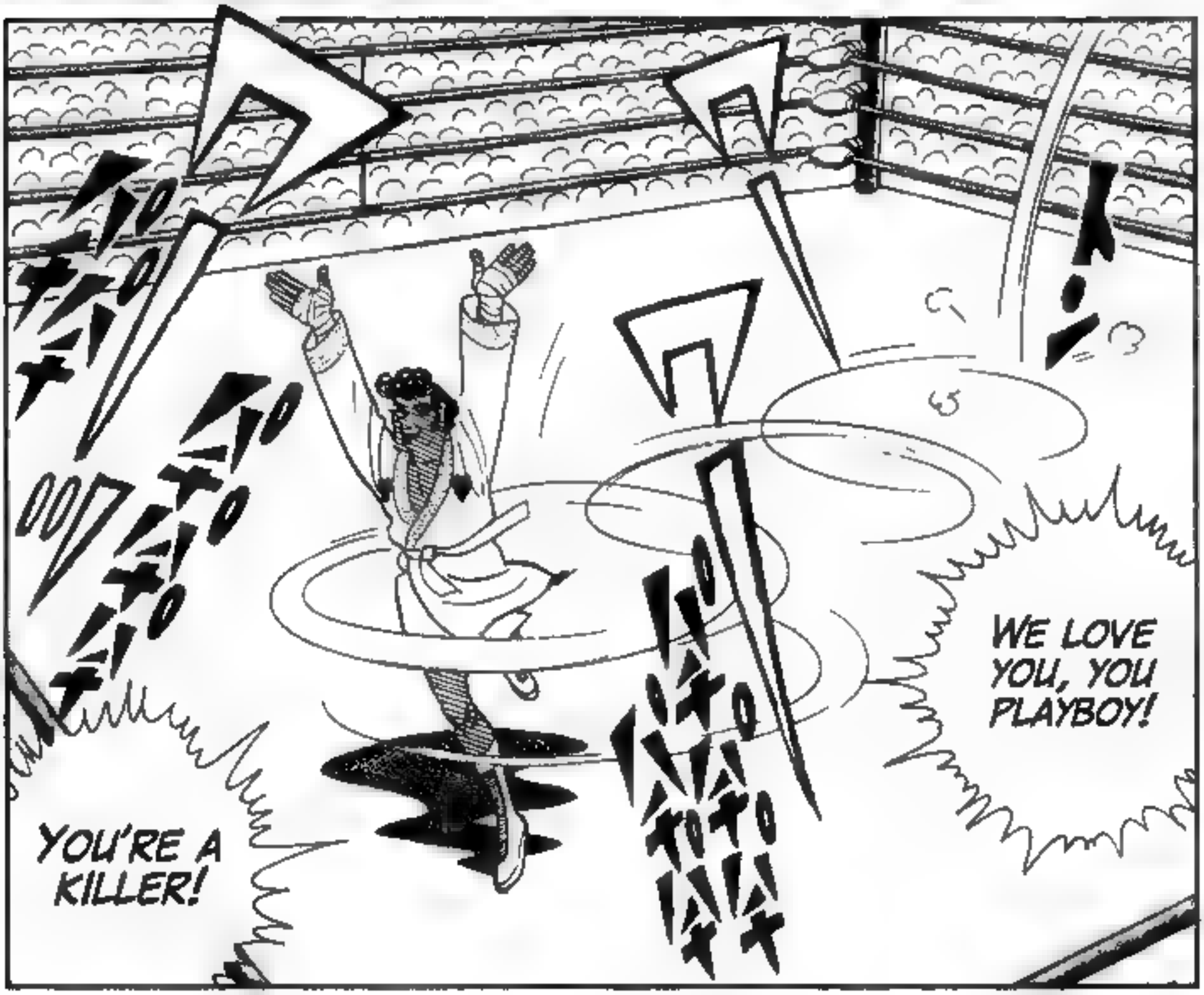
THE DEVIL...!

I MAY HAVE SET UP KORAKUEN STADIUM TO BE HIS VERY GRAVE TONIGHT...!

AND...

MAYBE I REALLY AM THE DEVIL LURING YABUKI JOE INTO HELL.

HEY, IT'S CARLOS RIVERA!
RIVERAAA!
THE SOUTH AMERICAN PANTHER!
VENEZUELA'S TERROR!
THE UNCROWNED EMPEROR!
YOU'RE THE BEST!


YOU'RE A KILLER!
WE LOVE YOU, YOU PLAYBOY!

HE IS IN THE PRIME OF HIS YOUTH AND JUST ABOUT EVERYTHING IS GOING HIS WAY.

NATU-RALLY.

NOW IS IT JUST ME, OR WOULD YOU SAY HE'S LOOKING EVEN MORE HIGH-SPIRITED THAN USUAL?

FLASHY AS EVER, THE BEAUTIFUL BUT DEADLY BEAST OF VENEZUELA, CARLOS RIVERA!

AH, THERE HE IS...!

THANKS TO THIS UNEXPECTED HEATED CONFRONTATION WITH YABUKI, HIS TRIP TO JAPAN HAS SURELY PAID OFF WITH THE FAT PAYCHECK HE'S LIKELY SIGNED FOR THIS MATCH.

HM... BUT CONSIDERING HOW THE EXHIBITION MATCH WITH YABUKI PLAYED OUT,

NOT ONLY THAT, HE'S GOT A WORLD TITLE MATCH WAITING FOR HIM UPON HIS RETURN TO VENEZUELA. IT'S NO WONDER HE CAN'T STOP SMILING.

THAN THIS FIGHT SHOULD TURN OUT TO BE A ONE-SIDED AFFAIR.

IF RIVERA CAN JUST SOMEHOW TAKE AWAY THE PRECIOUS ROPES THAT YABUKI RELIES UPON HEAVILY,

THEN PERHAPS HE FEELS CONFIDENT ABOUT HIS OPPONENT'S ROPE-TACTICS.

AFTER ALL, HE ONLY WON THAT FIGHT DUE TO AN UNEXPECTED TECHNICALITY DESPITE SUFFERING A DOUBLE-KNOCKDOWN.

I WOULDN'T HAVE EXPECTED SUCH A CHEERY EXPRESSION FROM HIM TODAY.

ACK!
AHH-

SO THEN, PERHAPS HIS ENTHUSIASM IS BACKED BY THAT CONFIDENCE TO SECURE A WIN TONIGHT.
I HEARD HE INTENDS TO TURN THE ROPES INTO STIFF IRON POLES OR WHATNOT...
YES, ABOUT THAT, ACTUALLY...

BAM BAM
CLASH
CLANGCLANG
TOOTTOOT
HONKHONK

THE FIGHTING DEMON!
KILLER JOE!
FINALLY, IT'S THE MAN WE'VE BEEN WAITING FOR!
TONIGHT'S THE NIGHT TO SETTLE THE ABRUPT INTERRUPTION TO THE DOUBLE-KNOCKDOWN IN THE PREVIOUS MATCH!
DESTROY THAT VENEZUELAN-WHATEVER!
YEAH, GET 'IM!

WE'RE CHEERIN' FOR YOU, JOE!

BEAT CARLOS AND THEN AIM FOR A WORLD-TITLE MATCH!

PLEASE DON'T SWARM OVER MY FIGHTER!

H-HEY NOW, CLEAR THE WAY!

MY BOY'S ABOUT TO FIGHT THE MOST CRITICAL FIGHT OF HIS CAREER SO DON'T DISTURB HIM!

LOOK AT THE DRUNK...

THANKS FOR THEM SUPPORTIVE WORDS!

OH, I SURE HOPE THINGS TURN OUT LIKE YOU SAY!

AHA... HAHA HA!

GETTING ALL ECSTATIC JUST BECAUSE HE'S FINALLY EARNED A BIT OF RECOGNITION AFTER YEARS OF BEING IGNORED...

HE MUST FEEL LIKE HE'S ON THE TOP OF THE WORLD TONIGHT.

HE'S DRUNK OFF THE CROWD'S ENERGY AND CAN HARDLY CONTROL HIMSELF.

'CAUSE WE'RE GONNA NEED YOU TO WORK YOUR HARDEST FOR TONIGHT'S ALL-IMPORTANT MATCH, AHAHAHA!

HEYA, MISTER REFEREE AND JUDGE! HOPE YOU HAD A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP!

THE MAT AND ROPES ARE IN TIP-TOP SHAPE, RIGHT? RIGHT!?

AH, OF COURSE IT IS! IT IS THE FIGHT OF THE CENTURY, AFTER ALL!

CALM DOWN, OLD MAN.

GOTTEN INTO THE OWNER OF TANGE GYM?

W-WHAT HAS...

HMM?

O-OH, RIGHT, RIGHT...

LOOK, THEY'RE WAITING FOR US AT THE CENTER OF THE RING.

HAHA, S-SORRY FOR BEING A LITTLE LATE.
AHA... HAHA...

GOT IT!?
AND MAKE SURE TO KEEP YOUR THUMBS TUCKED IN AT ALL TIMES WHILE FIGHTING,
ALL HITS BELOW THE BELT WILL BE PENALIZED,
IF ONE FIGHTER GOES DOWN, THE OTHER IS TO QUICKLY MAKE HIS WAY BACK TO HIS CORNER.

LOOK, JOE...
I EVEN GOT NEW, SHINY GLOVES TO GO ALONG WITH THIS MATCH!

GIVE ME YOUR HANDS THEN.

WHAT'S WRONG...? YOU'RE TREMBLING.

HAHA...

HEH HEH.

I CAN'T IMAGINE WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN TO YOUR JAW IF YOU TOOK A PUNCH FROM CARLOS' FISTS IN THESE...

6 OZ. LEATHER GLOVES WITH A BIT OF PADDING...

.....

YOU SURE CAN TALK BIG NO MATTER THE TIME AND PLACE...

I AIN'T THE ONLY ONE WHOSE JAWS ARE AT RISK OF BEING PULVERIZED!

HA, YOU AND YOUR WORRIES!

I'M TRYING MY BEST TO LOOK TOUGH AND COMPOSED BUT...

HAHA... I'M NO GOOD COMPARED TO YOU...

THERE YOU GO AGAIN WITH THE DEMORALIZING TALK.

I CAN'T HELP BUT TREMBLE ALL OVER THE MOMENT I TOUCH THESE GLOVES AND THINK OF THE GRIM REALITY...

GET A GRIP ON YOURSELF.

HE'S RIGHT.

IS THIS REALLY THE KIND OF ATTITUDE A SECOND SHOULD SHOW,

JUST WHAT KIND OF PATHETIC SECOND AM I...

I CAN'T EVEN COME UP WITH A PROPER STRATEGY FOR MY FIGHTER...

IN FRONT OF THE ACTUAL BOXER WHO'S GONNA BE RISKING HIS LIFE?

SO STOP MAKING SUCH A GLUM FACE!

HEY, COME ON NOW. IT AIN'T LIKE YOU'RE ATTENDING A FUNERAL

I COULD EVEN DIE WITH A SMILE NOW.

I'VE GOT NO REGRETS AT ALL IN FIGHTING A MATCH WHERE BOTH SIDES CAN GO ALL OUT.

A REAL MATCH AT LAST WITHOUT ANY RESTRICTIONS OR TRAINING GLOVES.

HAHA... YOU KNOW, I'M STRANGELY FEELING QUITE REFRESHED RIGHT NOW.

JOE...!

....

BUT IN ANY CASE, CARLOS...

THAT'S THE WHOLE REASON WHY I'VE COME TO THIS RING RIGHT NOW...

SHOW ME EVERYTHING YOU'VE GOT TONIGHT.

YOU WON'T HOLD BACK ANY LONGER, RIGHT?

HAHAHA...
I'LL MAKE AN EVEN QUICKER FINISH THAN I DID WITH TIGER OZAKI AT 16 SECONDS.
NO...
I WANT YOU TO TIME ME LIKE I MENTIONED EARLIER.
ALRIGHT, ROBERT...

I'M NOT GOING THROUGH WITH THAT.
I SAID NO, CARLOS.
WHA?
I CAN ALMOST SMELL SOMETHING LIKE GUNPOWDER FROM HIM...
HE LOOKS COMPLETELY DIFFERENT.
HIS EYES ARE QUITE PECULIAR TONIGHT.
JUST A MINUTE AGO, YOU WERE TELLING ME TO FINISH HIM OFF IN ONE ROUND...!
WHY NOT!?

WHEN I FIRST MET YOU IN THE VENEZUELAN SLUMS...

IT'S THE SAME SCENT OF GUNPOWDER THAT I SENSED,

GUN-POWDER ...?

YES... THAT'S WHAT I SENSED WHEN THE TWO OF YOU SHOOK HANDS AT THE CENTER OF THE RING JUST NOW...

UNDERS-TAND?

A CARELESS SLIP-UP HERE MIGHT MEAN AN INJURY THAT CAN COST YOUR UPCOMING WORLD TITLE-MATCH.

BUT THERE'S NO POINT TO HURRY UNNECESSARILY.

THERE'S NO DOUBT ABOUT YOUR VICTORY,

PLEASE LISTEN TO ME AND DO WHAT I SAY ONCE IN A WHILE!

DON'T YOU WANT TO BECOME THE WORLD CHAMPION, CARLOS!?

I'VE GOT NO INTENTION OF GIVING JOE EVEN THE TIME TO SCRATCH ME TONIGHT, ROBERT.

A MANAGER CAN ONLY EVER GO SO FAR AS TO BE A MERE SPOKESMAN FOR HIS FIGHTER, ROBERT...

I UNDERSTAND. DO AS YOU WISH THEN.

I WON'T SAY ANYTHING MORE.

THE ENTIRE STADIUM IS NOW HOLDING THEIR BREATHS.

THE MOMENT OF FATE IS ALMOST UPON US!

BOTH FIGHTERS ARE MAKING THEIR WAY TO THE CENTER OF THE RING WITH THEIR ARMS RAISED.

THE CLASH IS ALREADY STARTING!

HE'S CHARGING RIGHT FOR JOE LIKE A STORM!

AH! NO, WAIT! CARLOS IS RUSHING IN!

AH-

FOR SOME REASON, RIVERA HAS SUDDENLY STOPPED HIS ADVANCE!

W-WAIT, WHAT?

AND BOTH FIGHTERS ARE SLOWLY CIRCLING AROUND EACH OTHER, LOOKING FOR AN OPENING.

HE'S NOW DISTANCED HIMSELF,

...

I'M GONNA CHEER FOR THE OTHER GUY SINCE HE GAVE ME THAT BOTTLE OF BOOZE.
YOU CAN DO IT! LET'S GO, JOE!
COME ON, JOE!
COME ON, CARLOS RIVERA!

AH! RIVERA FLASHES A SERIES OF LEFT JABS!

BUT YABUKI'S BLOCKING THEM WITH A TOUGH GUARD AS HE SLOWLY APPROACHES TOWARDS CARLOS!

THOSE JABS LOOK AS STRONG AS AN ORDINARY FIGHTER'S STRAIGHTS!

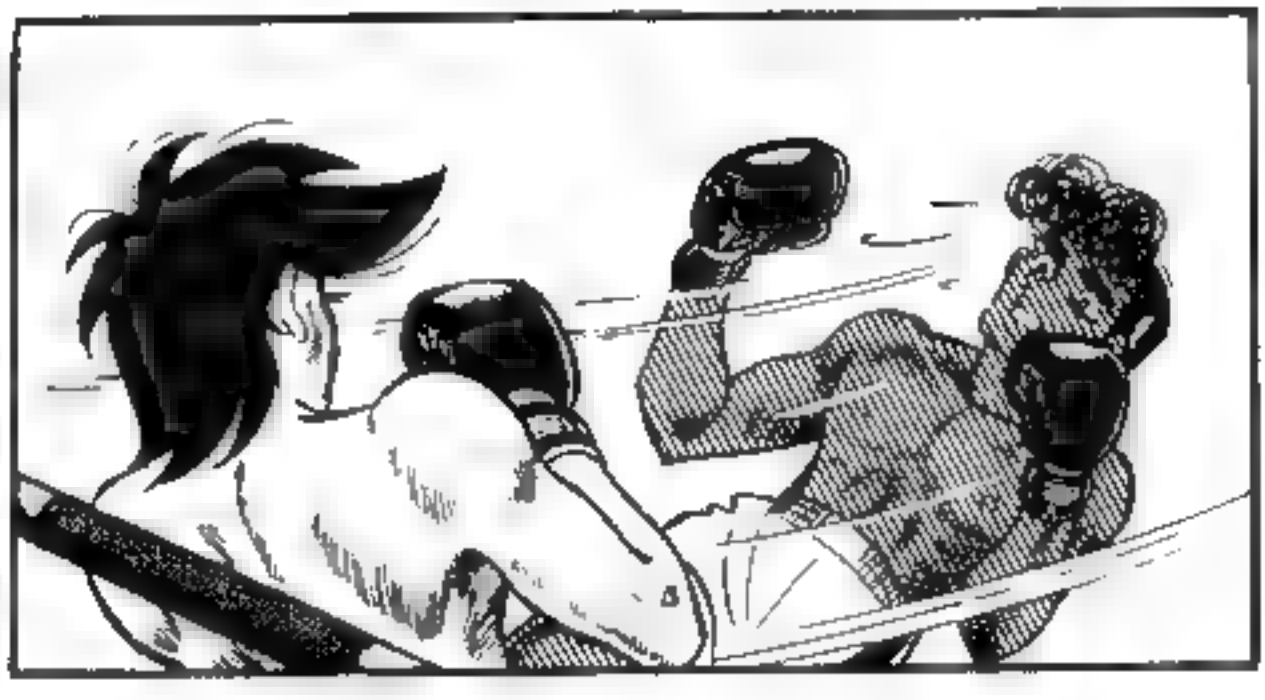
LOOK HOW QUICK THEY ARE!

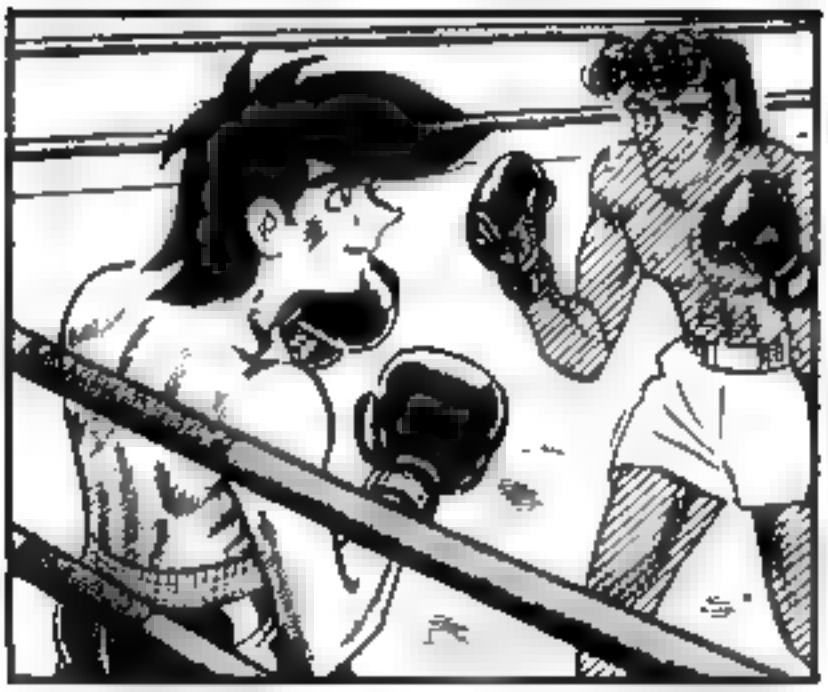
BUT CARLOS IS ALSO DRAWING BACK WHILE HE JABS!

A-AHHH! YABUKI IS CLOSING IN EVEN MORE!

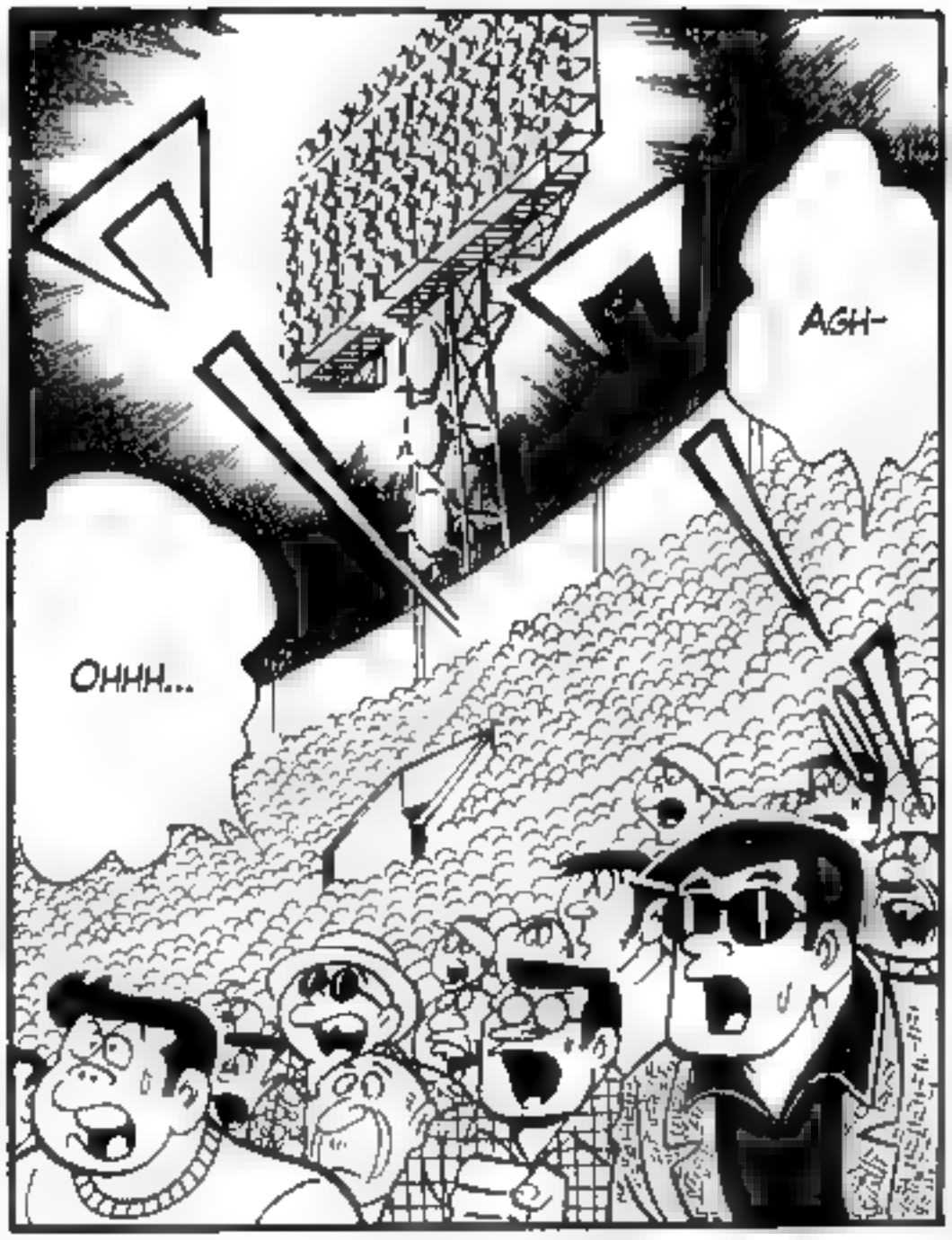
NGH-

YABUKI CONTINUES TO CLOSE IN!
CARLOS IS NOW DRIVEN ALL THE WAY TO THE ROPES!





Y-
YEAH.
H-HE'S GONNA USE THE ROPES...!


AGH-
OHHH...

MEANWHILE, RIVERA DODGES RIGHT AND LEFT WHILE HE PATIENTLY LOOKS FOR AN OPENING...
YABUKI WALKS AWAY FROM THE ROPES WHILE JABBING AT CARLOS. PERHAPS HE FEELS HESITANT ABOUT USING THE ROPES AFTER RIVERA'S CONFIDENT STATEMENT THAT HE HAS A WAY TO COUNTER IT!
THE CROWD ANTICIPATES THE SAME TACTIC AS LAST MATCH!
YABUKI'S AT THE ROPES!

STOP!

WHAT A LET DOWN.

MAN, HARDLY ANYTHING HAPPENED THAT ROUND.

WHEW...

PERHAPS HIS CONCERN FOR HIS UPCOMING WORLD TITLE-MATCH WAS THE REASON. I'M SURE HE'D LIKE TO END THIS MATCH WITH NO SERIOUS INJURIES IF POSSIBLE.

FOR A MOMENT, HE LOOKED TO PUSH FORWARD AGGRESSIVELY BUT HE ENDED UP HOLDING BACK...

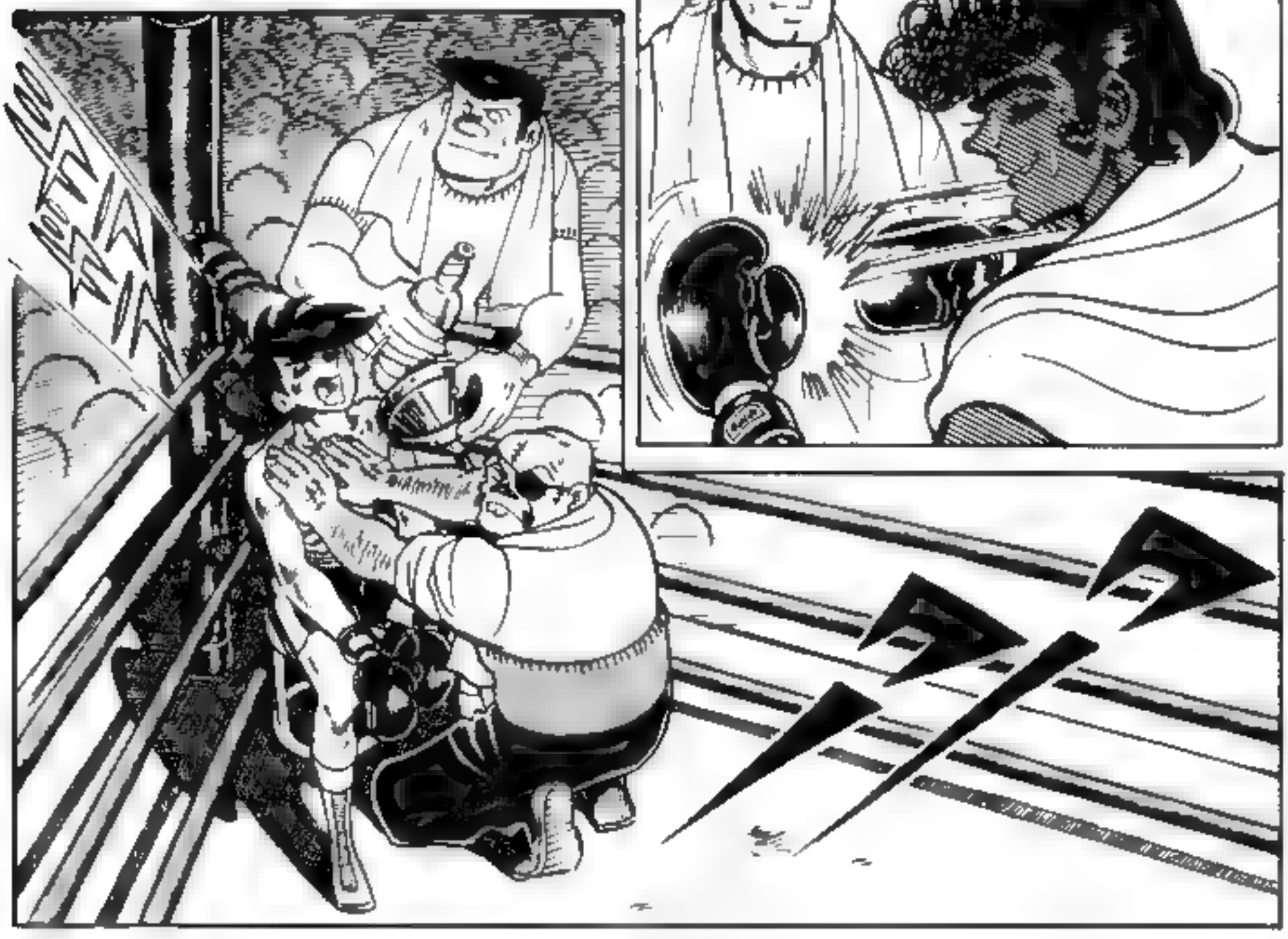
RIVERA LOOKED AWFULLY CAUTIOUS OUT THERE.

5-5 FOR THAT ROUND, IN MY OPINION.

IT'S JUST AS YOU SAID...
HE'S COM-PLETELY DIFFERENT TONIGHT

WEREN'T YOU PLANNING ON FINISHING HIM OFF AS SOON AS THE ROUND STARTED?

BUT IT'S ALL GOOD. I'LL TAKE MY TIME IN FINISHING OFF.
AS SOON AS I SAW THE GLINT IN HIS EYES, I CHANGED MY MIND ABOUT A QUICK KO.


WHAM

S-SO... HOW IS HE TONIGHT...?

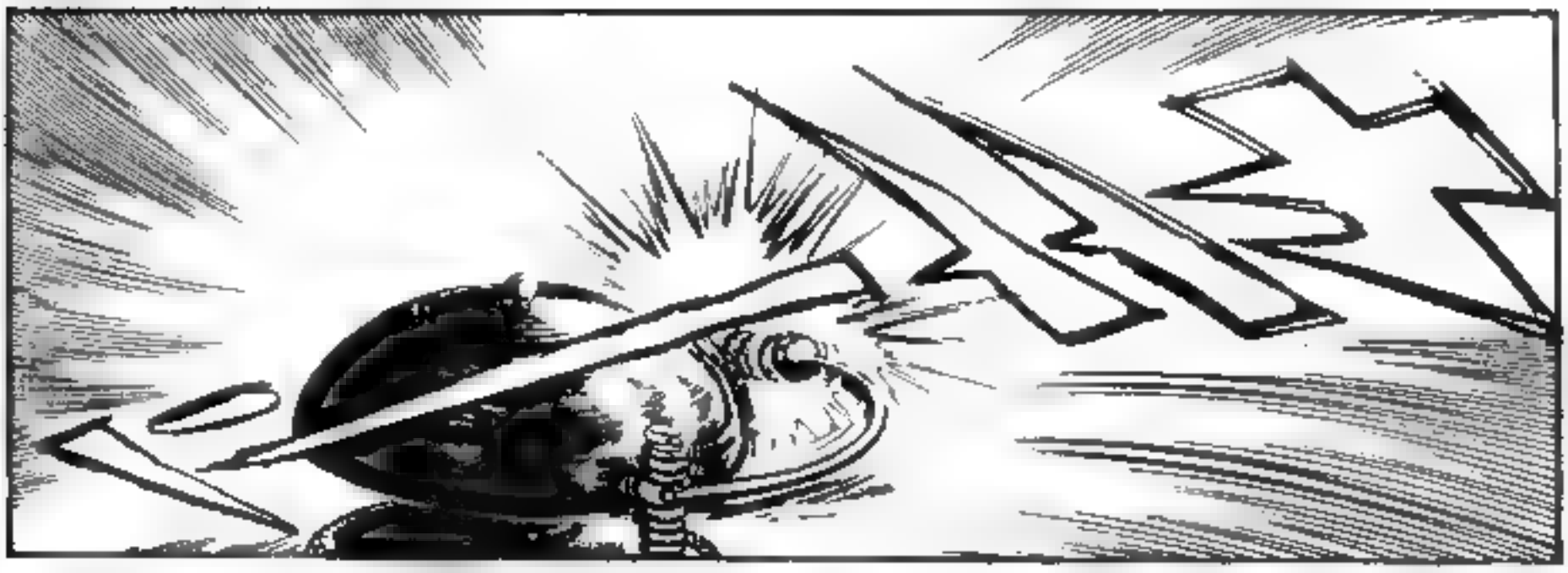
...

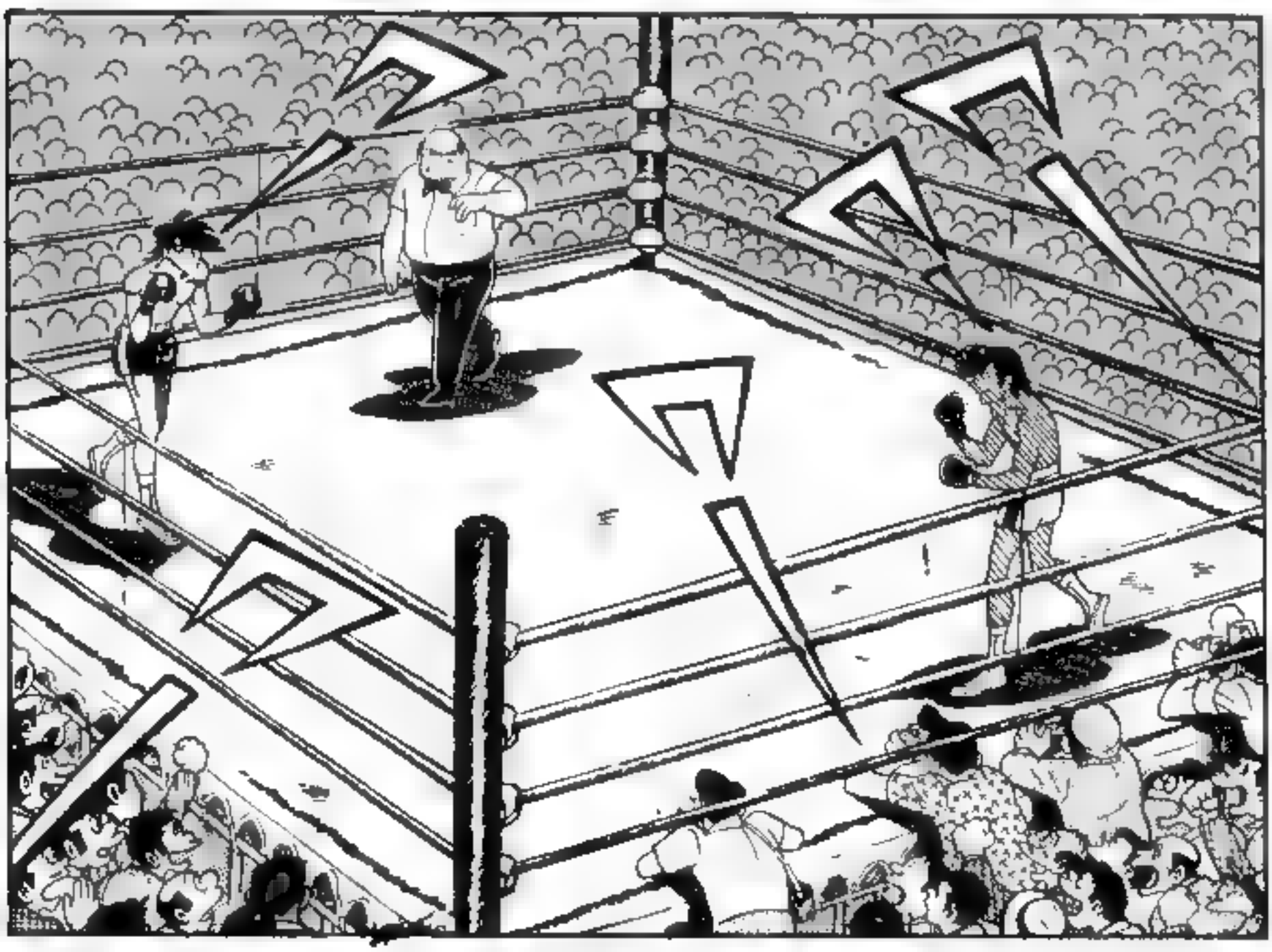
SORRY. DON'T TALK TO ME RIGHT NOW...

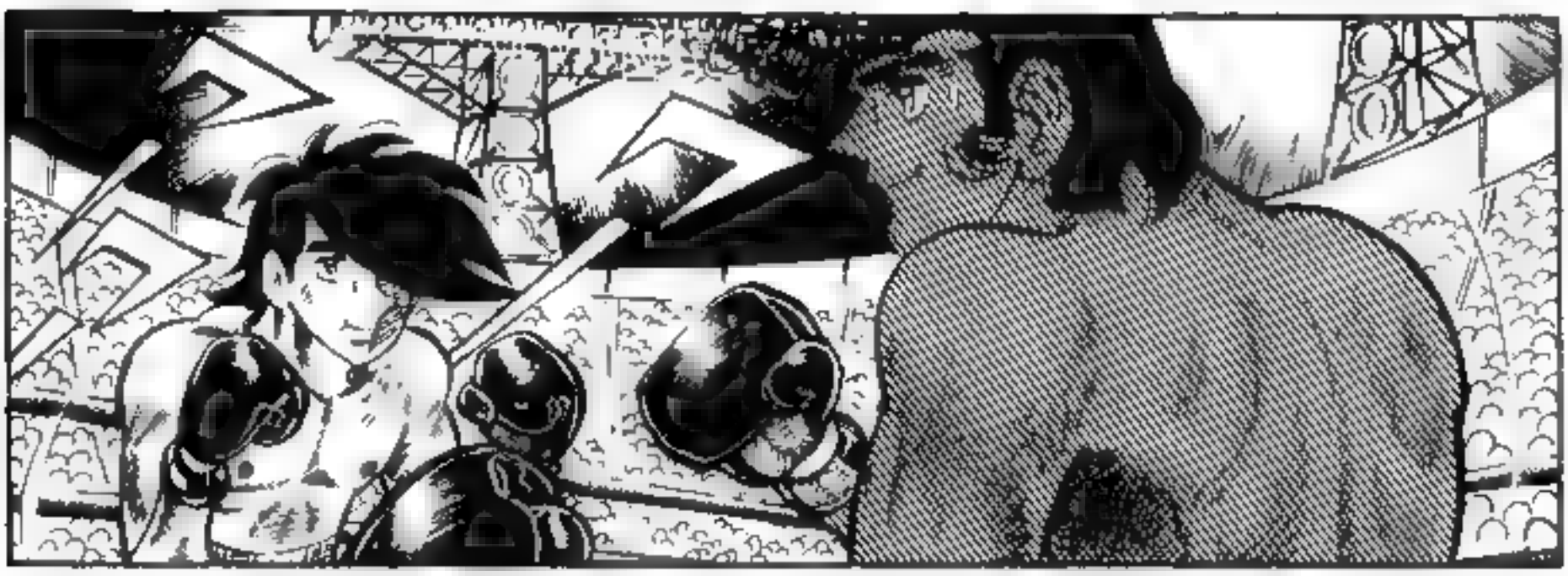
YOU THINK YOU CAN WIN? WELL?

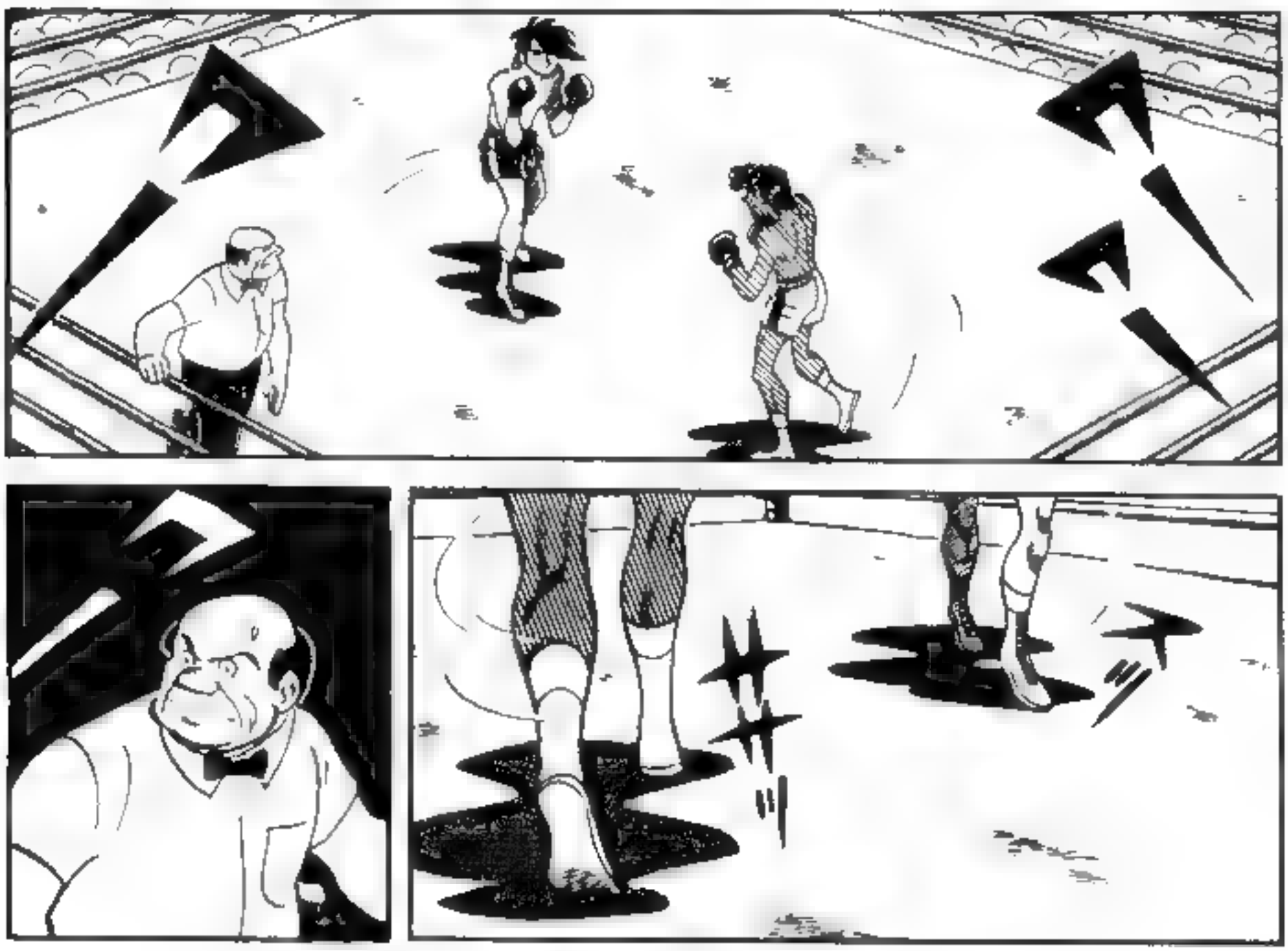
SECONDS OUT OF THE RING.

H-HERE'S YOUR MOUTHPIECE, JOE.









WHAT'S THE MATTER, KILLER JOE!?

SO GET IN THERE AND SHOW WHAT YOU'RE MADE OUT OF!

I THOUGHT YOU WEREN'T THE TYPE TO JUST WATCH YOUR OPPONENT!

START FIGHTING ALREADY, YOU TWO!

COME ON, FIGHT!

AHAHAHA!

IF THIS IS HOW YOU'RE FARING AGAINST A GUY LIKE YABUKI, YOU'RE BETTER OFF CANCELING THAT WORLD TITLE-MATCH!

AND WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING, MR. VENEZUELAN TERROR!?

BUT I NEVER EXPECTED CARLOS TO BE THIS CAUTIOUS AS WELL...

I CAN OF COURSE UNDERSTAND YABUKI'S HESITANCE CONSIDERING HIS OPPONENT,

YES...

B-BOTH FIGHTERS ARE BEING AWFULLY PRUDENT, WOULDN'T YOU SAY?

OOF-

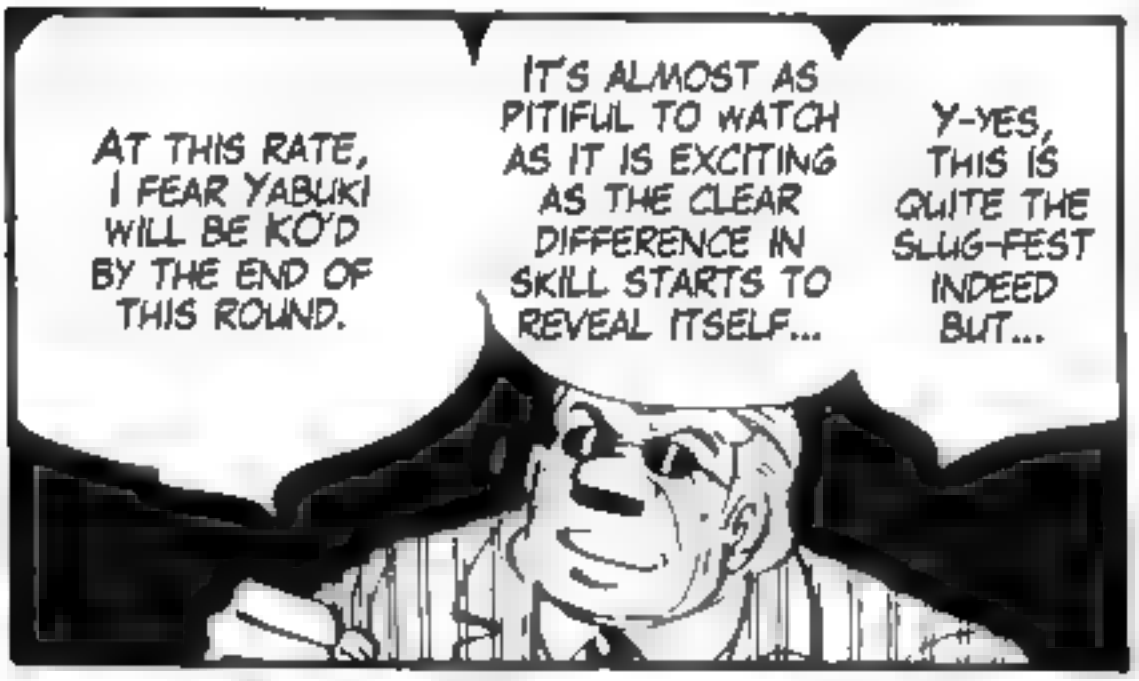
THERE YOU GO!
LET THE FIGHTING BEGIN!

YES! THAT'S IT, JOE!
COME ON! GET IN CLOSER!

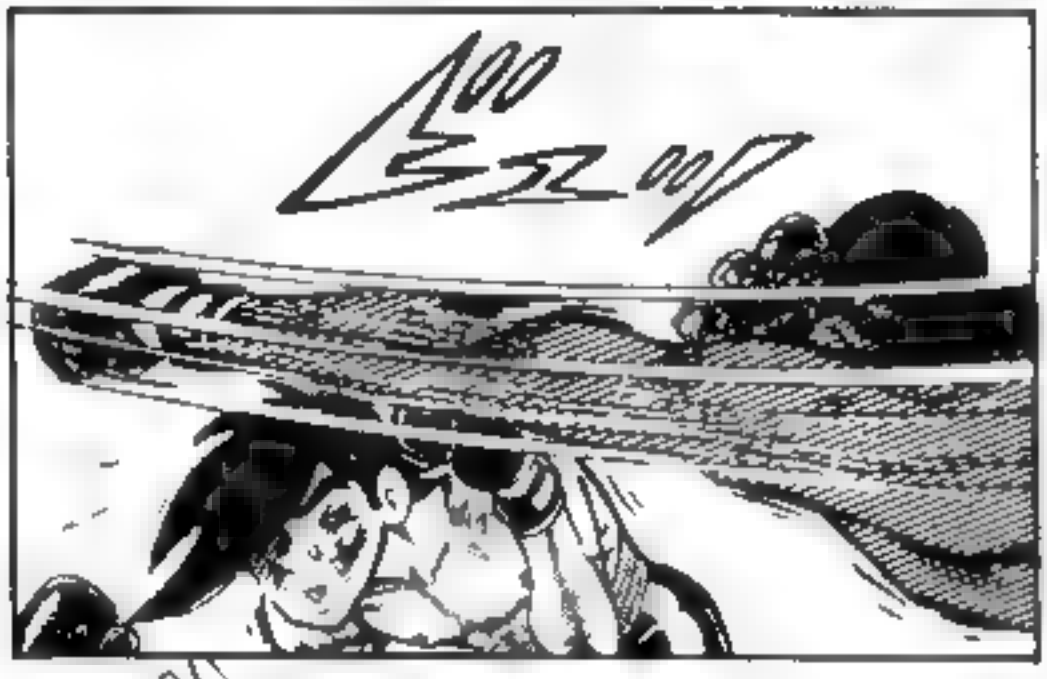
AGHHH-

HEH
HEH
HEH
TAKE
THIS!

HUFF

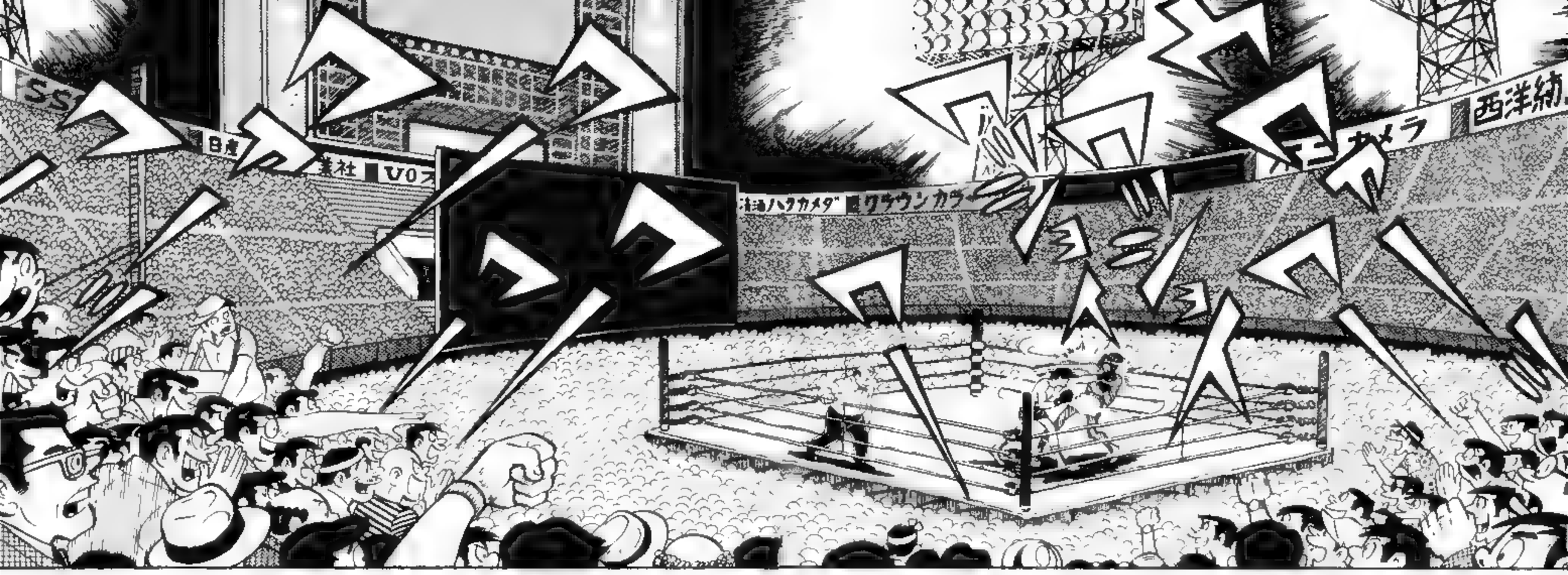

AT THIS RATE, I FEAR YABUKI WILL BE KO'D BY THE END OF THIS ROUND.
IT'S ALMOST AS PITIFUL TO WATCH AS IT IS EXCITING AS THE CLEAR DIFFERENCE IN SKILL STARTS TO REVEAL ITSELF...
Y-YES, THIS IS QUITE THE SLUG-FEST INDEED BUT...

FOR A MOMENT, I EXPECTED THIS ROUND MIGHT AGAIN HAVE BOTH FIGHTERS CAUTIOUSLY SIZING EACH OTHER UP,
THE SITUATION HAS DEVELOPED INTO A FIERCE SLUG-FEST!
BUT MY EXPECTATIONS HAVE BEEN BLOWN AWAY BY THIS FIERCE STORM NOW RAGING IN THE CENTER OF THE RING!



SON
OF A-!

HAHHH!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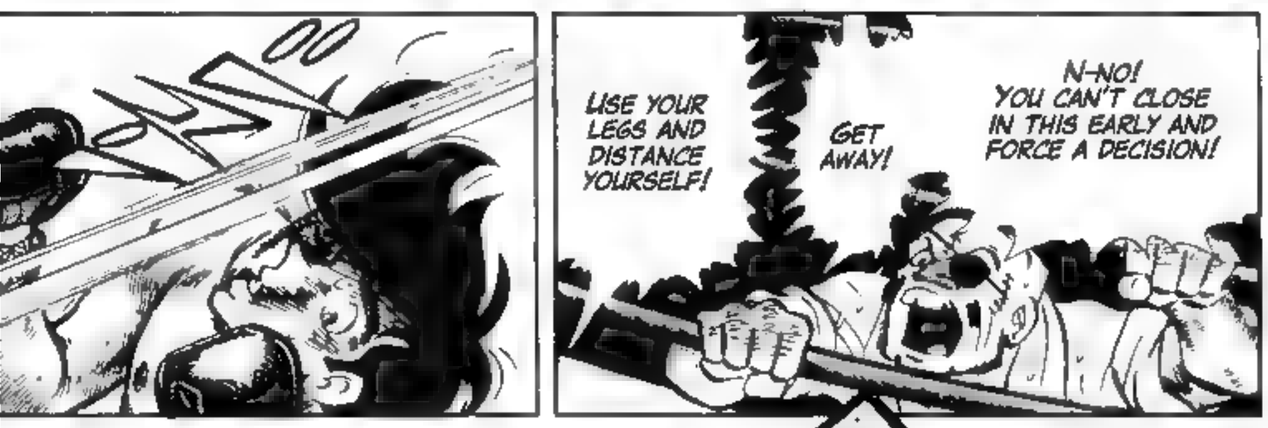

USE YOUR LEGS AND DISTANCE YOURSELF!
GET AWAY!
N-NO! YOU CAN'T CLOSE IN THIS EARLY AND FORCE A DECISION!

HMPH!

WAIT, NO- IS HE ALSO BLEEDING FROM HIS MOUTH!?
AHH! YABUKI'S RIGHT EYELID IS CUT!

THE FIGHT IS TURNING EVEN MORE FURIOUSLY FAST AND RUTHLESS!

R-RIGHT!

G-GET THE VASELIN OUT, NISHI!

THAT'S THE BELL, YABUKI!

STOP!

PANT

PANT

SPIT!

HUFF

MY MOUTH-PIECE...

YOUR CORNER IS THAT WAY!
J-JOE! WHERE DO YOU THINK YOU'RE GOING!?

HEH HEH.

I...

DIDN'T YOU HEAR ME YELLING ABOUT USING YOUR LEGS TO CREATE SOME DISTANCE!?
DAMN, YOU'VE BEEN CUT UP PRETTY BAD...

YOU KNOW HE'S JUST TRYING TO HELP YOU AS YOUR SECOND AND MANAGER!

DON'T BE LIKE THAT, JOE.

OH SHUT UP! BOTH OF YOU!

...

I TOLD YOU NOT TO TALK TO ME, DIDN'T I?

WE BELIEVE IN YOU!

YOU CAN DO IT YABUKI!

GO GO BROTHER JOE!

LET'S GO JOE!

YOU GO, CARLOS!

SINCE WE DID GET SOME BOOZE FROM CARLOS, LET'S GIVE HIM A CHEER TOO!

....

HAH!

バキ!

I'LL KILL YOU!

YOU DIRTBAGS!

GAHH! NO, PLEASE!

WHAT'S THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN?

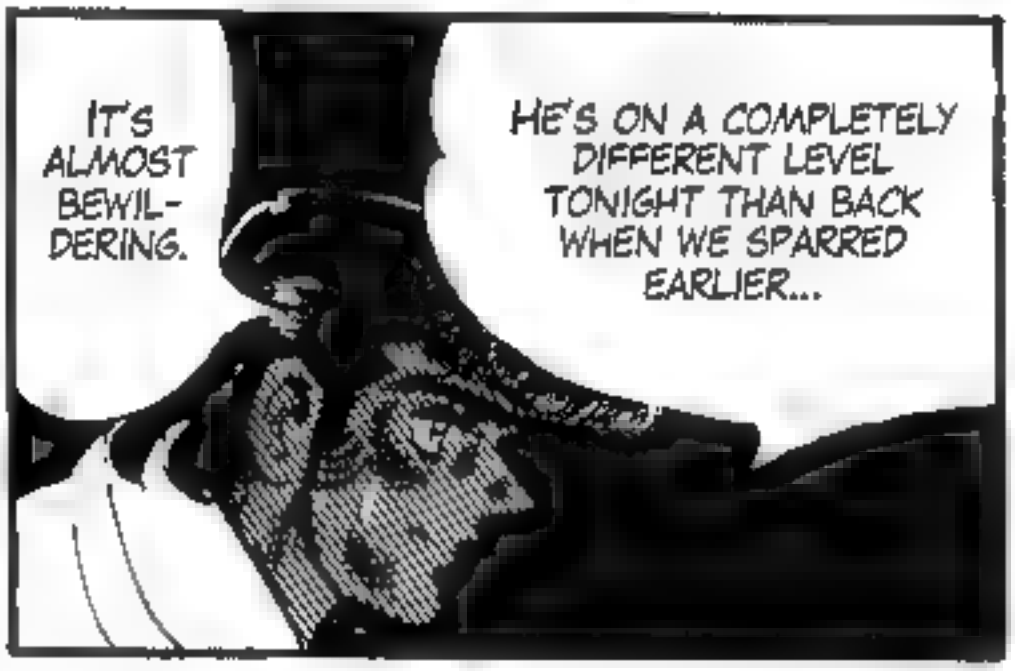
STILL ACTING, CARLOS...?

DIDN'T YOU PROMISE MS. YOUKO THAT YOU WOULDN'T BE ACTING TONIGHT AT KOURAKUEN STADIUM?

IN ALL MY YEARS AS YOUR MANAGER, I'VE NEVER ONCE SEEN SO MANY BRUISES ON YOU...
THEN HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN ALL THE HITS YOU'RE TAKING?

I'M NOT ACTING ...

....


IT'S ALMOST BEWIL-DERING.
HE'S ON A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT LEVEL TONIGHT THAN BACK WHEN WE SPARRED EARLIER...

HAHA...
ズシ!!!

NO, NO, NO!
IS IT GONNA BE TOUGH?
JUST A LITTLE SURPRISED, THAT'S ALL... VICTORY'S STILL ASSURED!

TWEEEET!

I'LL FINISH THE FIGHT IN THE NEXT ROUND.

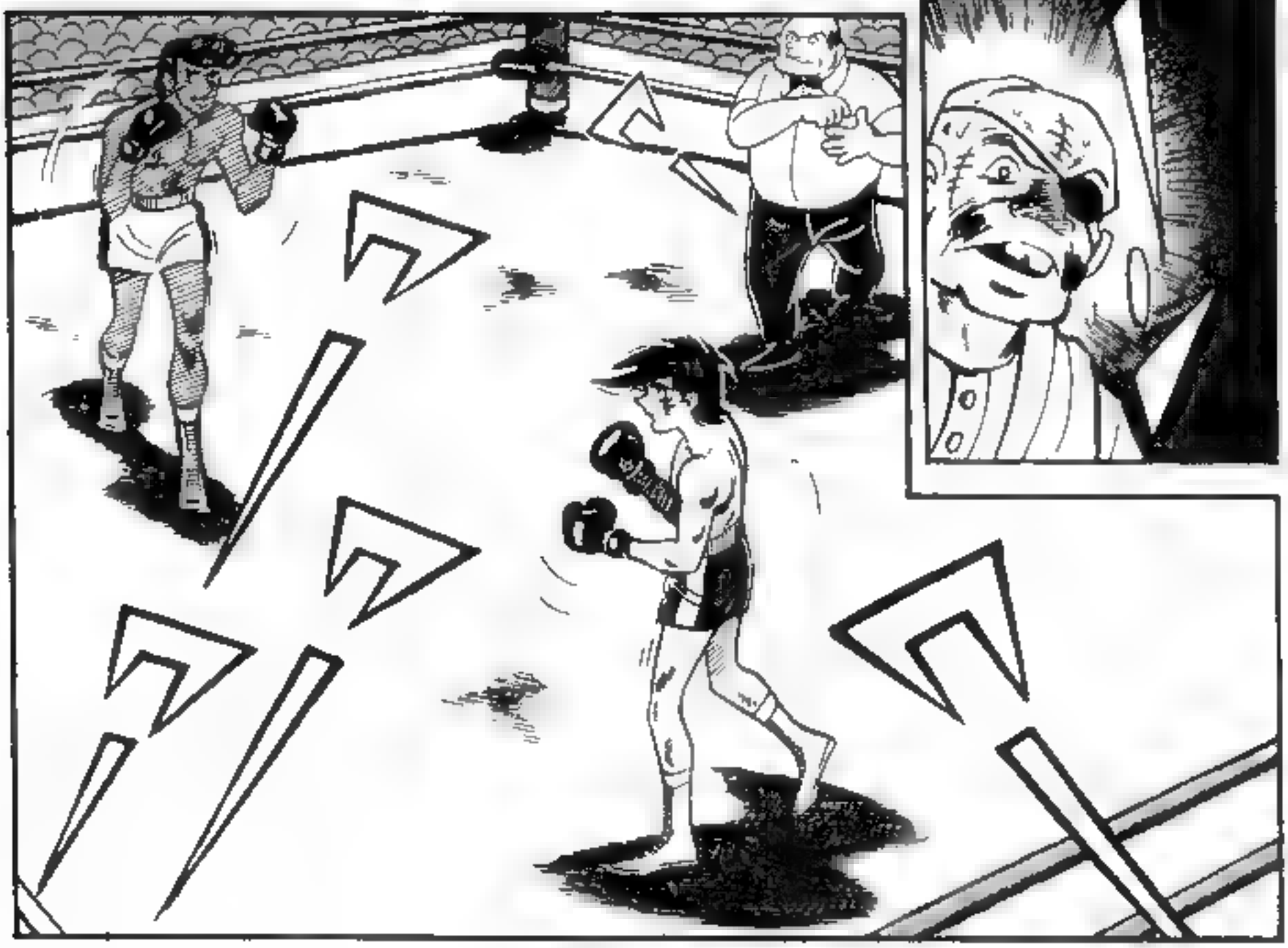
I'LL FINISH IT IN THE NEXT ROUND!
I'LL SAY IT AGAIN.

YOU'VE STILL GOT 7 ROUNDS LEFT.
WELL, LIKE I SAID EARLIER, DON'T NEEDLESSLY PUSH YOURSELF.

GOT IT...
GOT IT?

IN THIS NEXT ROUND...
TIME TO GO SEE IF THE ROPES WILL CHANGE TO IRON OR NOT,
ALRIGHT THEN...

J-JOE! NO WAIT!
JUST WATCH CLOSELY... IT'LL BE QUITE THE SIGHT IF HE MANAGES TO PULL IT OFF.



AH-

UGHH...

HMPH...

W-
WHOA-

A SHOCKING TURN OF EVENTS!

A- AHHH!

INCREDIBLE...

AHHH!

CARLOS LOOKS LIKE HE'S HOMING IN FOR THE KILL...

YABUKI'S GUARD IS HARDLY WORKING AT ALL, AS CARLOS' HIGH AND LOW PUNCHES ARE FORCIBLY FINDING A WAY THROUGH!

AS SOON AS THE BELL RANG TO SIGNIFY THE START OF THE ROUND, CARLOS DASHED FORWARDS AND IS NOW PUMMELING YABUKI INTO A CORNER!

TAKE THIS!

D-DAMN IT...

HEH...
OOF-
UGH ...!

HEH

ドゴォ

GRUNT

GAHH!

H-HE DID IT!

AHHHH!

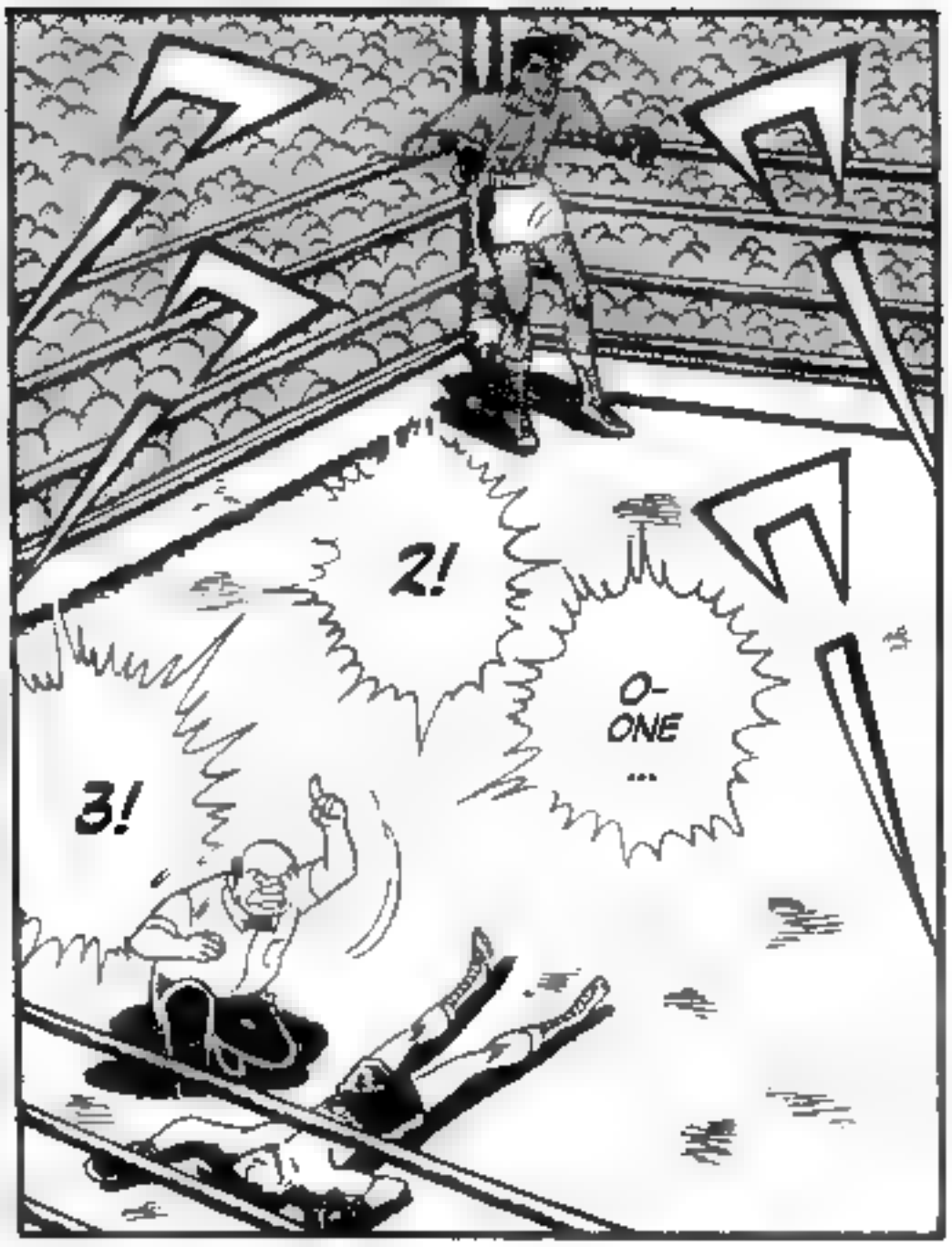
J-JOEEE!

BACK TO YOUR CORNER!

STOP!

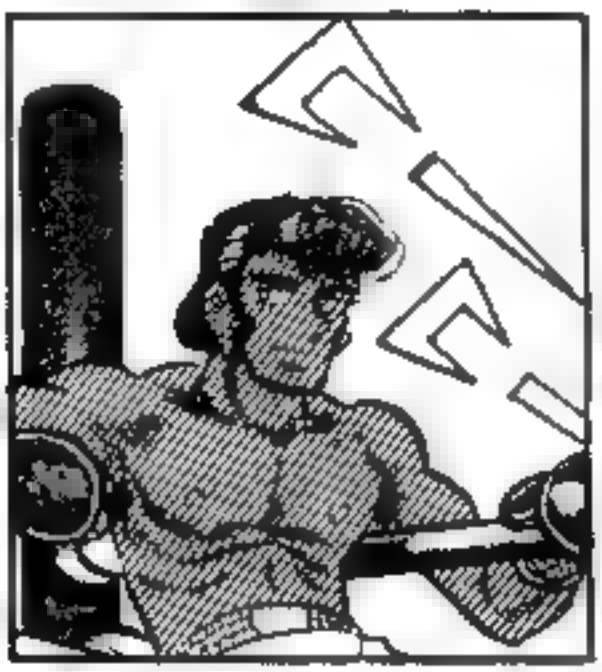
4!

H-
HAMMER...


2!
O-
ONE
...
3!

FELT LIKE
BEING POUNDED
WITH AN IRON
SLEDGEHAMMER...
THAT...
5!
6!

8!



SO YOU'RE
FINALLY
BARING
YOUR
ENTIRE
SELF...
HAHA...
7!

'COURSE.

C-CAN YOU STILL FIGHT?

BUT IT APPEARS HIS LEGS HAVE JUST ABOUT GIVEN OUT...

AS HE MUSTERS THE STRENGTH TO STAND UP BY CLUTCHING ONTO THE ROPES!

Y-YABUKI HAS JUST NARROWLY BEAT THE COUNT-DOWN,

HEH HEH

FIGHT ON!

YOU CAN'T JUST LET THE MATCH OF THE CENTURY END IN 3 ROUNDS!

C'MON! WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH YOU, YABUKI!? PULL YOURSELF TOGETHER!

NOW THAT YOU'VE COME FULL OUT...

THIS STADIUM WILL CRY IN SHAME IF YOU DO!

YOU SHOW ME HOW YOU PLAN TO COUNTER MY ROPE-TACTICS...?

WHY DON'T,

T-THE ROPES...!

AHHH!

AH-

THIS WILL BE... VERY HARD TO WATCH...

Y-YABUKI IS SERIOUSLY PLANNING TO USE THE VERY ROPES THAT CARLOS HAS ALREADY PUBLICALLY STATED HE CAN COUNTER 100%!

HA...

WELL?

I DON'T CARE IF YOU USE MAGIC OR CHEAP TRICKS, JUST CHANGE THESE ROPES INTO IRON POLES ALREADY!

HEH HEH. COME AT ME THEN.

AHH! RIVERA IS RUSHING FOR YABUKI ON THE ROPES!

WHA!?

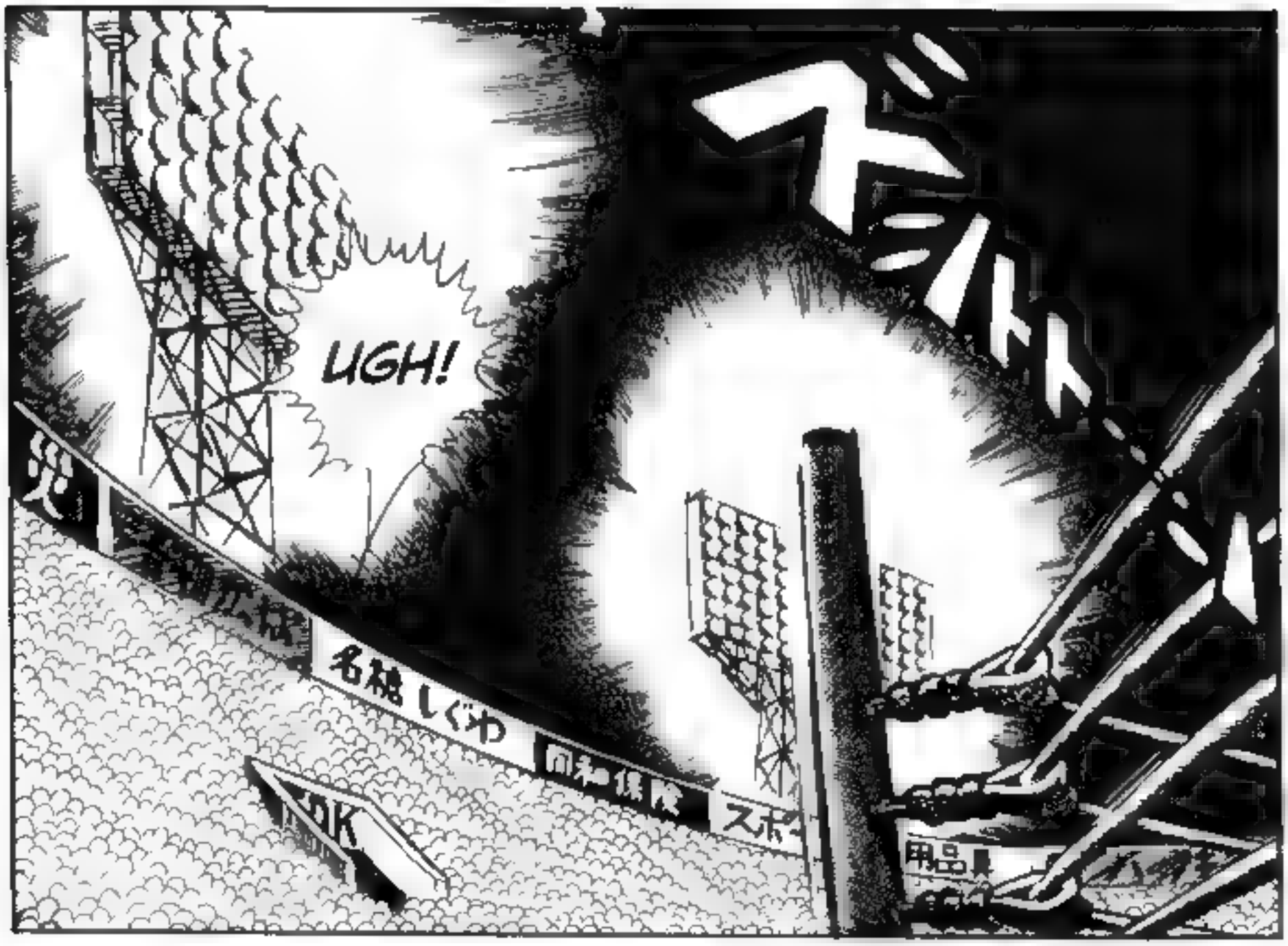
I-IT'S A HUGE UPPERCUT SWING COMING IN FROM SO LOW THAT IT ALMOST GRAZES THE RING MAT!

HE CAN'T BOUNCE BACK!

EVEN THOUGH YABUKI IS LEANING BACK WITH HIS WHOLE WEIGHT,

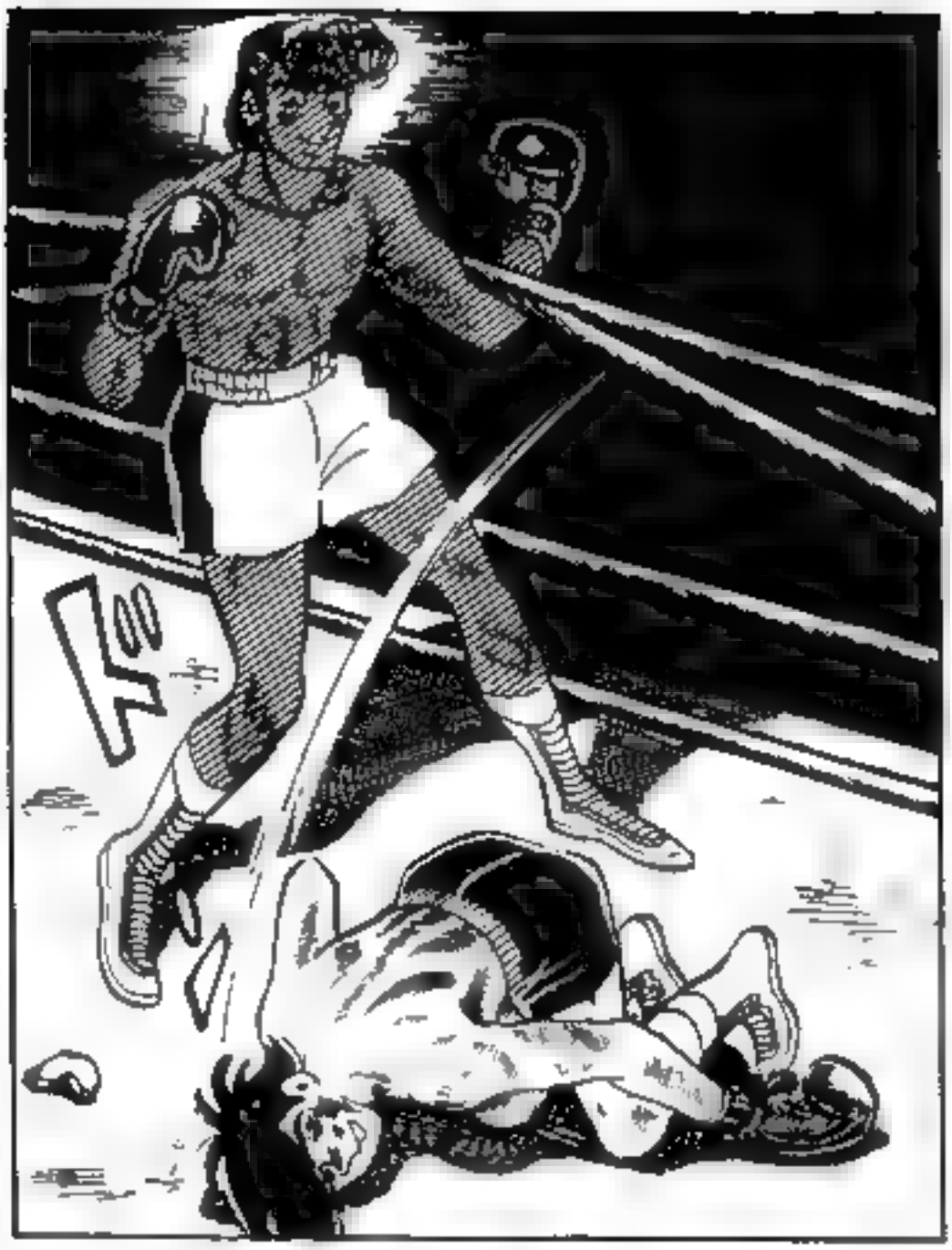
INSTEAD, IT'S TANGLED UP ON THE UPPER ROPES THAT YABUKI IS LEANING BACK ON!

T-THE UPPERCUT DIDN'T CONNECT!


UGH!
名物しぐれ
OK

GAHH...
AHHH...

A-
AGHHH...



HOLY MOLY...
.....

AFTER THE ROPES TURNED STIFF, HE HAD NO WAY TO ESCAPE FROM HIS CORNERED SITUATION!
HE'S DOWN! YABUKI GOES DOWN FOR THE SECOND TIME!

3!
2!
1!
HA...
A 90 DEGREE UPPERCUT SWING CATCHES THE ROPE FROM BELOW AND STRETCHES IT OUT TIGHT ABOVE,
I SEE...
LEAVING THE REMAINDER OF THE ROPE TOO STIFF FOR YABUKI TO BOUNCE OFF IT AND COUNTER!
5!
4!
NOT THAT I EVER REALLY DOUBTED HIS WORDS FROM THE START...
HE COMPLETELY SEALED THE ROPES AWAY FROM ME.
IT'S... JUST AS HE SAID...
7!
6!
I NEVER THOUGHT HE'D DO IT THAT WAY...
BUT...

UP WE GO THEN...

8!

A FULL BLAST FROM JUST BARELY A FOOT AWAY... I THOUGHT MY BACK MIGHT BREAK FROM THE IMPACT FOR A MOMENT...

THAT WAS... ONE HELL OF A PUNCH.

...

I'M NOT GONNA LET YOU GET AWAY SCOT-FREE...

BUT, AFTER SUFFERING THAT PAINFUL DOWN...

HE ACTUALLY STOOD UP...

H... HE STOOD UP...

IT'S TIME FOR AN UPSET...

NEXT TIME, IT'LL BE THE OTHER WAY AROUND...

F...
FIGHT ON!

J-JOE MANAGED TO STAND BACK UP, OLD MAN...

MNN...

OOF...

THAT WAS CLOSE.

WHOA-

PANT

OR IT'LL BE THE END FOR ME...

I CAN'T SUFFER ANOTHER DOWN...

UNDERS-TAND?

THAT'S WHY... I CAN'T AFFORD TO BE DOWNED ONE MORE TIME...

PANT

PANT

PANT

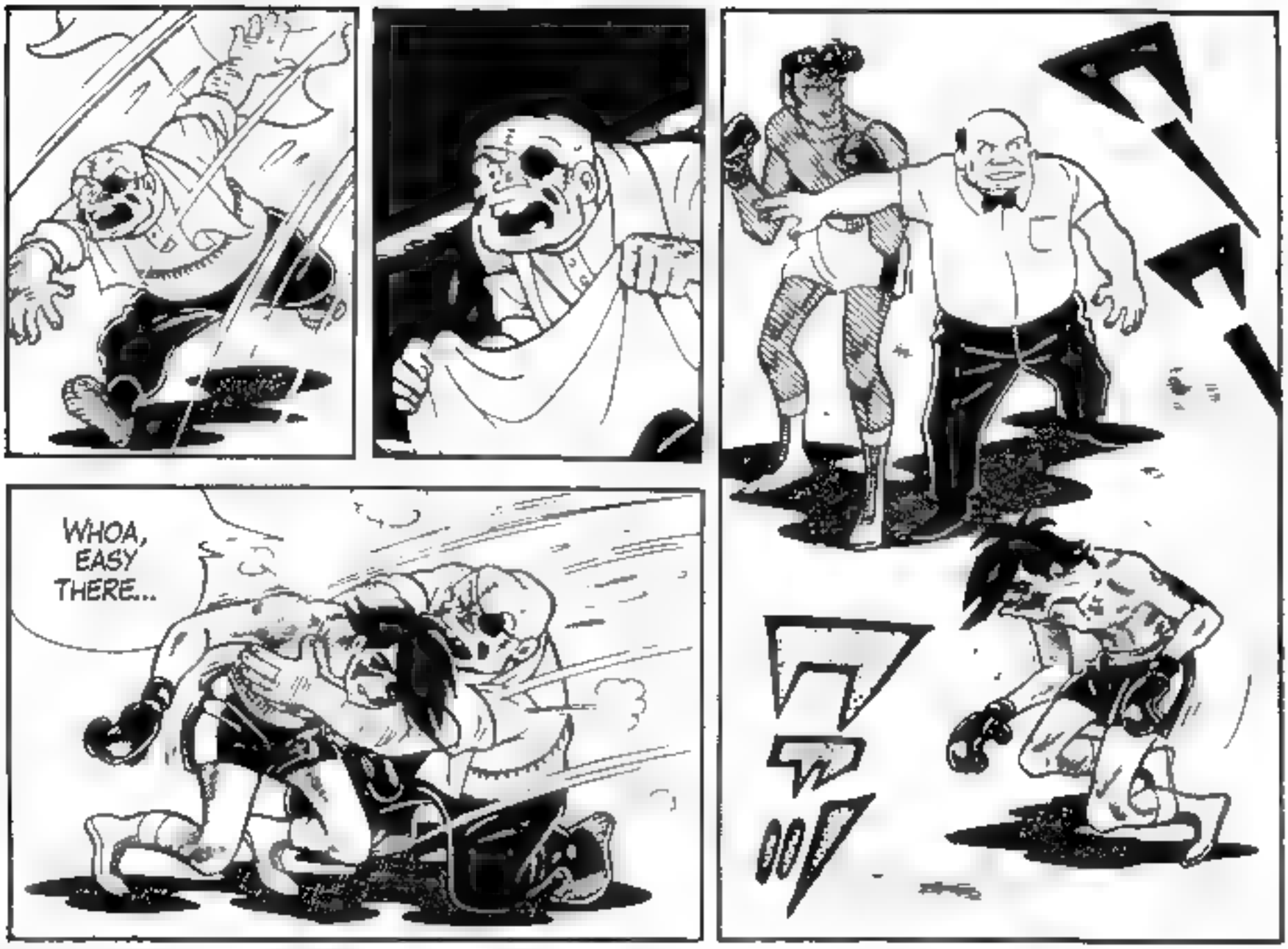
REALLY THINK I'M STUPID ENOUGH AS TO TAKE THAT RISK ON THE ROPES FOR NO REASON...?

DO YOU...

G-GIVE ME THE TOWEL, NISHI!
SO DON'T...
GET! COCKY!

THE ROUND IS OVER, CARLOS!

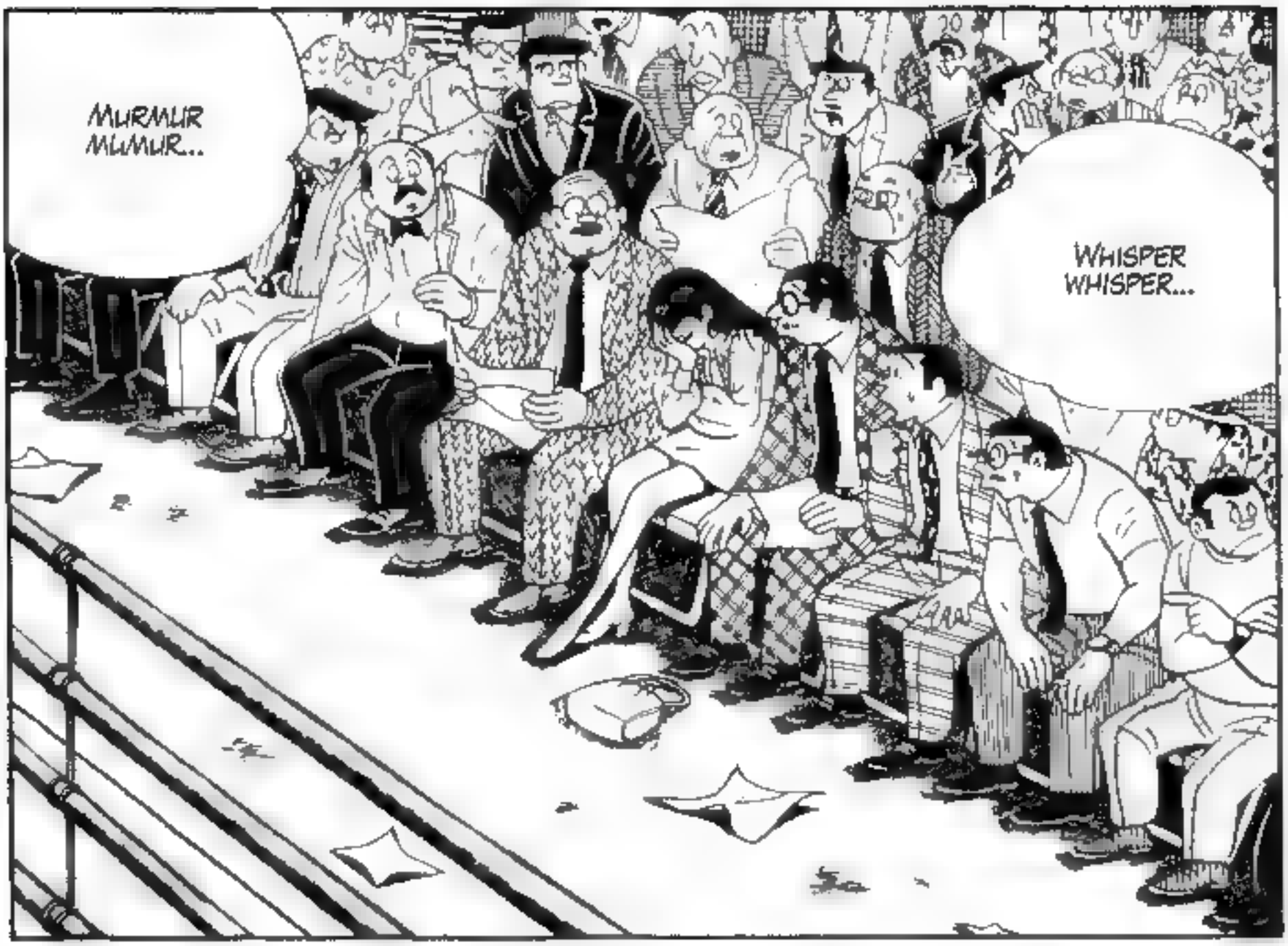
S- STOP!


WHOA, EASY THERE...

SOMEONE STOP THIS FIGHT...! I CAN'T WATCH...
N-NO... I CAN'T...

HAHA...
AHA...

JUST WHAT KIND OF PERSON IS THIS JOE YABUKI...?
HOW CAN HE STILL FIGHT BACK LIKE THAT...?
I... CAN'T BELIEVE IT...


MURMUR MUMUR...
WHISPER WHISPER...

SHE IS?
HEY, LOOK... SHE'S ACTING REALLY STRANGE...

CAN YOU C'MERE FOR A SEC?

HEY DOC!

I DON'T WANT TO CAUSE A FUSS.

N-NO PLEASE,

ARE YOU ALRIGHT, MA'AM? MAY I ASK WHAT THE MATTER IS?

ARE YOU FEELING UNWELL...?

T-THANK YOU.

IF YOU'RE FEELING UNWELL, COME FOLLOW ME.

DID SOMEONE CALL FOR A DOCTOR?

I... I'M FINE. I JUST NEED A WALK..

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONCERN.

NOT SURPRISING CONSIDERING THIS FIGHT'S EVEN LEAVING US MEN DRENCHED IN COLD SWEAT.

THE FIGHT MUST'VE BEEN TOO BRUTAL FOR HER.

HMM... I GUESS EVEN FOR A BIG-TIME PROMOTER, SHE'S STILL A WOMAN IN THE END.

THE ROPES...
AIT

MUMBLE MUMBLE
I GOTTA USE THEM TO...
IS SOMETHING WRONG? THE MEDICAL ROOM IS THAT WAY...

YES, PLEASE DO NOT WORRY ABOUT ME.

WELL, ALRIGHT THEN...

MY APOLOGIES BUT I THINK I'LL RETURN TO MY SEAT.

W-WAIT! ARE YOU... ARE YOU SURE YOU'RE FINE?

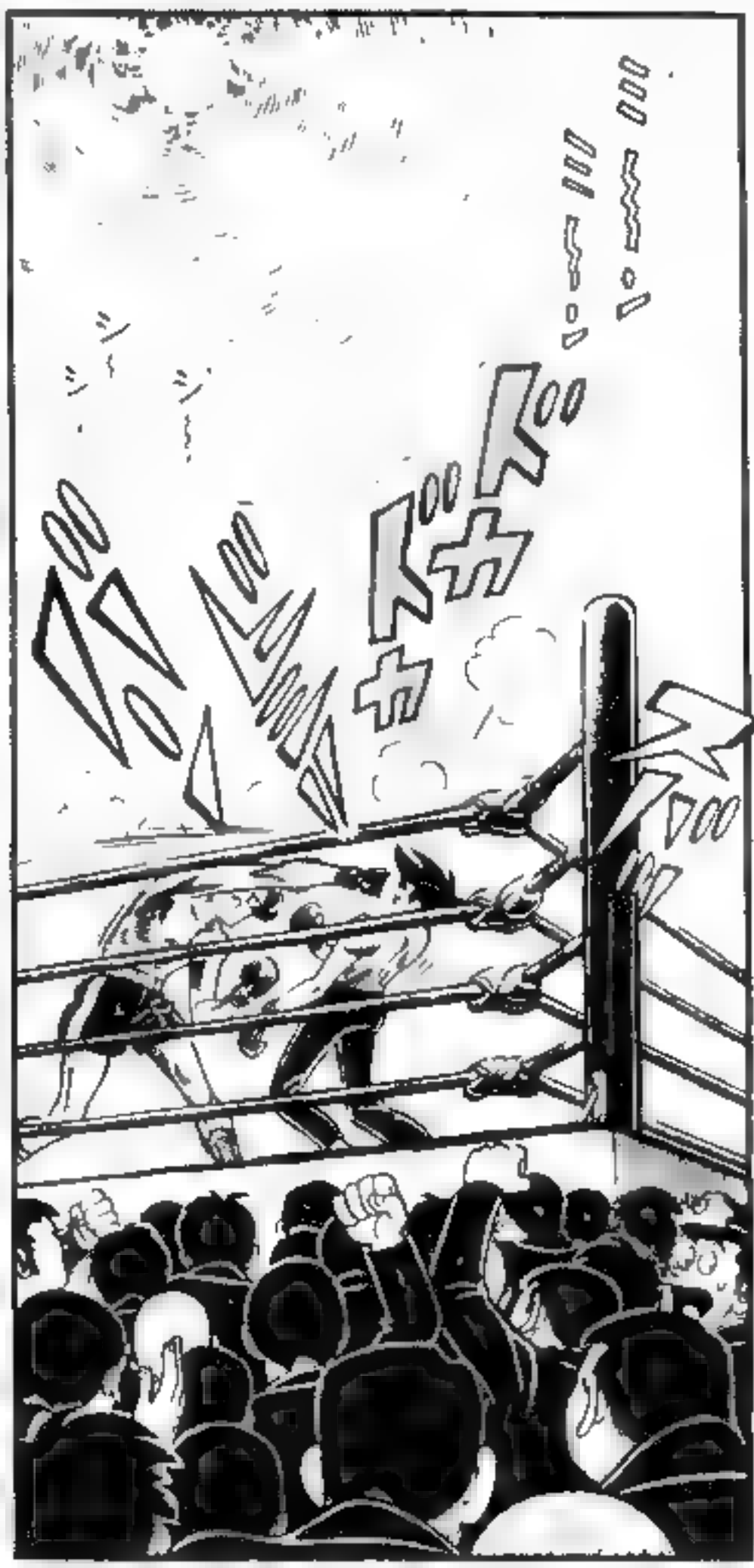
I CAN'T LEAVE MY SEAT NOW OF ALL TIMES...

HA HA....

YES... IT WAS DURING THAT ONE HOT SUMMER DAY IN THE JUVENILE DETENTION CAMP...

BUT THERE WAS ANOTHER TIME SIMILAR TO NOW...

IT'S BEEN MANY YEARS,



YABUKI AND RIKIISHI WERE IN THE MIDST OF A FIGHT AS BRUTAL AS THE ONE TONIGHT.

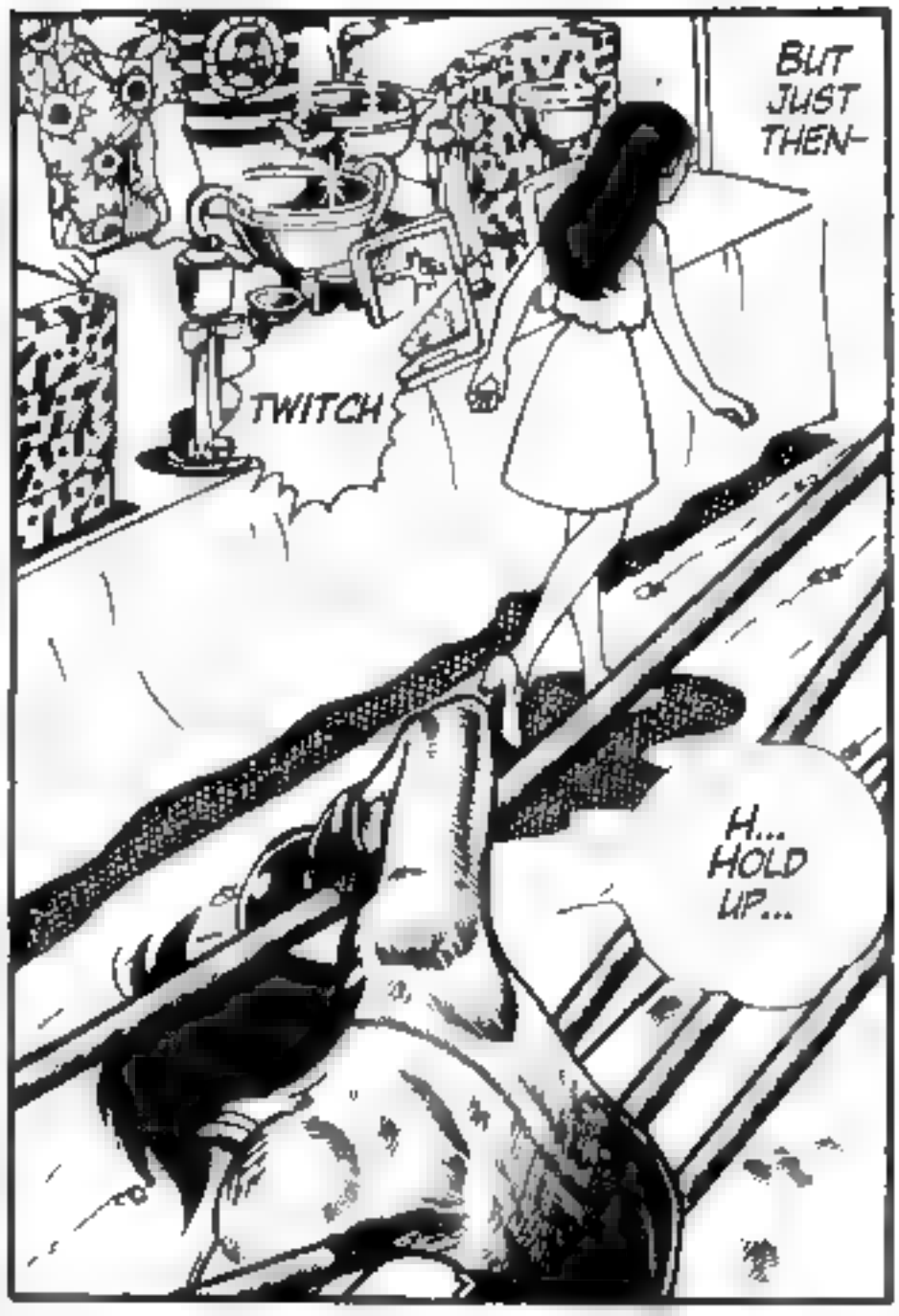
HEH HEH.

I COULDN'T BEAR WATCHING ANYMORE AND LEFT MY SEAT.

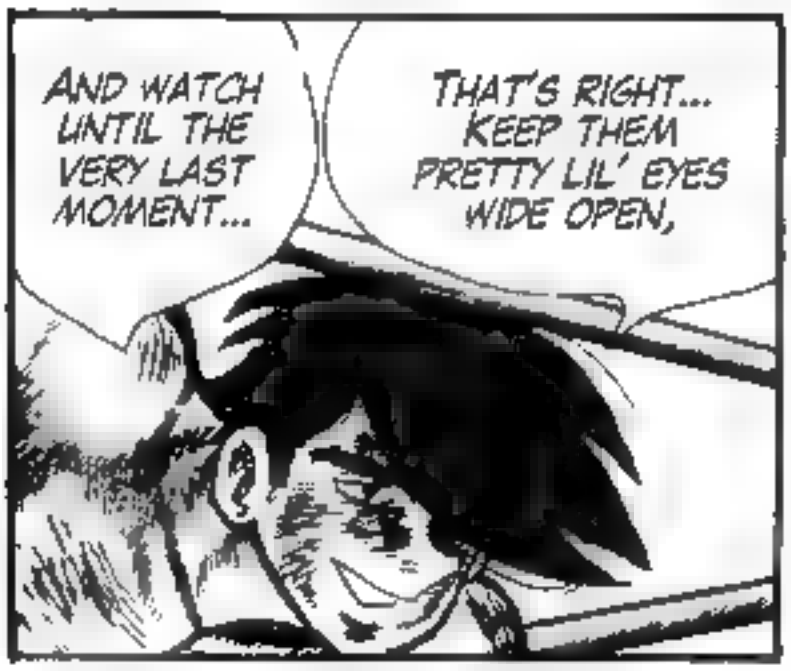
HOLY MOLY...

...

THINK YOU'RE GOIN'...?
WHERE D'YOU ...


BUT JUST THEN-
TWITCH
H... HOLD UP...

WOULDN'T YOU AGREE, PRINCESS?
FOR THE PERSON WHO STARTED THE FIRE TO FLEE FROM THE BURNING WRECKAGE.
IT AIN'T RIGHT...


AND WATCH UNTIL THE VERY LAST MOMENT...
THAT'S RIGHT... KEEP THEM PRETTY LIL' EYES WIDE OPEN,

SO YOU GOTTA TAKE FULL RESPONSI- BILITY 'TIL THE VERY END.
YOU'VE MASTER- MINDED THIS WHOLE FIGHT.
YOU...

I'M RESPON-SIBLE FOR THIS FIGHT.

THAT'S RIGHT...

HUH?

MUMUR

THE ROPES ...

OH, WERE YOU SAYIN' SOMETHING?

THE ROPES ...

I SAID IF YOU GET PUMMELED THAT ONE-SIDEDLY IN THE NEXT ROUND, I'M THROWING IN THE TOWEL NO MATTER WHAT!

H-HE'S COMPLE-TELY OUT OF IT...

JUST KNOW THAT I'LL WRING YOUR NECK WITH THE VERY TOWEL YOU THROW.

HAHA... GO AHEAD, I DARE YA.

I'M ONLY DOING THIS BECAUSE IF YOU'RE HURT ANY MORE THAN THIS, THAN FORGET ABOUT YOUR BOXING CAREER, YOUR VERY LIFE WILL BE IN DANGER.

DON'T THINK TOO BADLY OF ME...

CAN'T YOU REALIZE BY NOW THAT STUBBORN PRIDE OR TENACITY ALONE WON'T WORK ON THE 6TH-RANKED BOXER IN THE WORLD?

N-NOW, NOW. DON'T BE UNREASON-ABLE.

.....

BUT WHERE THE HELL ARE YOU GETTING THE IDEA THAT I'VE GOT NO CHANCE OF WINNING, DUMBASS?

HAHA... THOSE'RE SOME FANCY WORDS COMIN' OUT OF YOUR TRAP.

B-BUT JOE...!

CONTINUING THIS FIGHT WITHOUT ANY PLAN OR CHANCE OF SUCCESS IS PLAIN SUICIDAL.

THE OLD MAN'S RIGHT, JOE.

AND WE, AS YOUR SECONDS, WOULD BE ABETTING YOUR SUICIDE IF WE JUST KEPT QUIET ABOUT IT.

BUT NOW THAT IT'S PAINFULLY OBVIOUS THAT YOUR FINAL TRUMP CARD'S BEATEN, WHERE THE HELL ARE YOU STILL GETTING YOUR CONFIDENCE FROM!? DO YOU EVEN HAVE A PLAN?

Y-YOU KNEW ALL ALONG THAT CARLOS HAD A COUNTER AGAINST YOUR ROPE-TACTICS BUT YOU STILL WALKED RIGHT INTO IT PROBABLY BECAUSE YOU WERE TOO DISTRESSED TO ADMIT HE HAD YOU BEAT.

LET'S JUST SAY I'VE SET UP MY FUSEKI.

HEH.

SWISH

FUSEKI ...?

FUSEKI REFERS TO THE OPENING STRATEGIES. SOMETIMES, YOU'VE GOT TO PLAY A SEEMINGLY USELESS STONE TO GET YOUR OPPONENT TO LOWER HIS GUARD...

IN THE GAME OF GO,

UNDERS-TAND?

SECONDS OUT OF THE RING!

HE MUST STILL HAVE SOMETHING SUPPORTING HIM.

ONCE HIS ROPE-TACTICS WERE UNAMBIGUOUSLY CRUSHED...

I HAD EXPECTED HIM TO GO DOWN FOR GOOD,

AFTER THAT LAST ROUND...

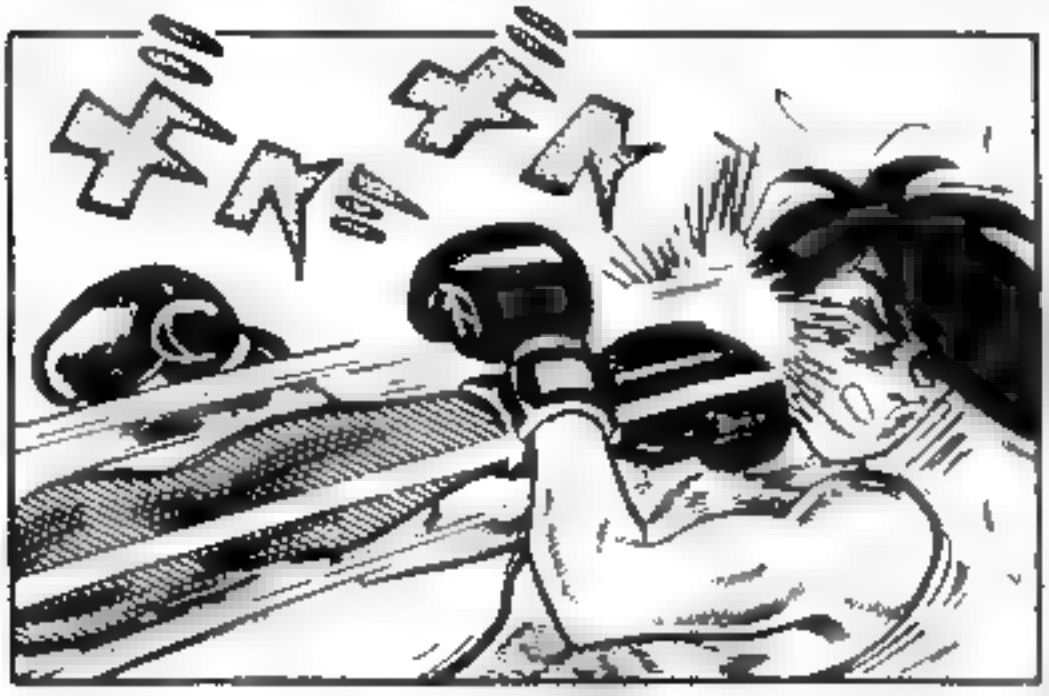
HE SHOULDN'T HAVE GOTTEN UP,

AND... I GET THE FEELING IT'S NOT SOMETHING VAGUE LIKE TENACITY OR SPIRIT.

THERE'S CONCRETE LOGIC BACKING HIS RESISTANCE...!

I DON'T KNOW,

WHAT IT IS YOU'RE STILL RELYING ON, BUT I'LL OBLITERATE IT!

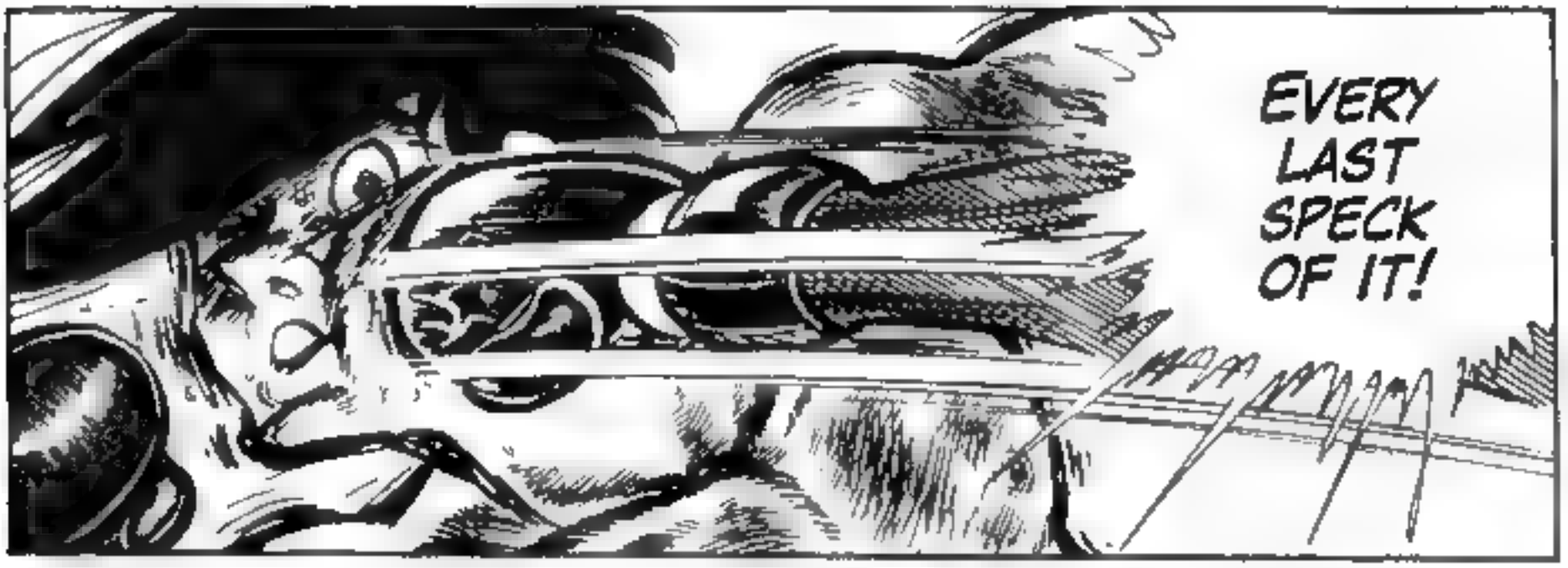


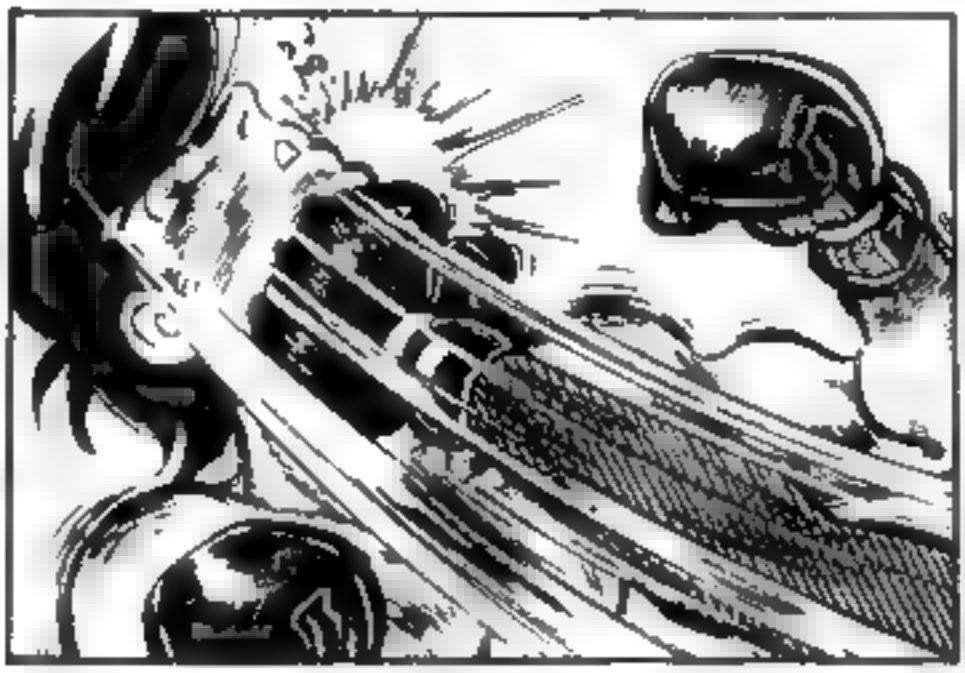
I'LL CRUSH IT...

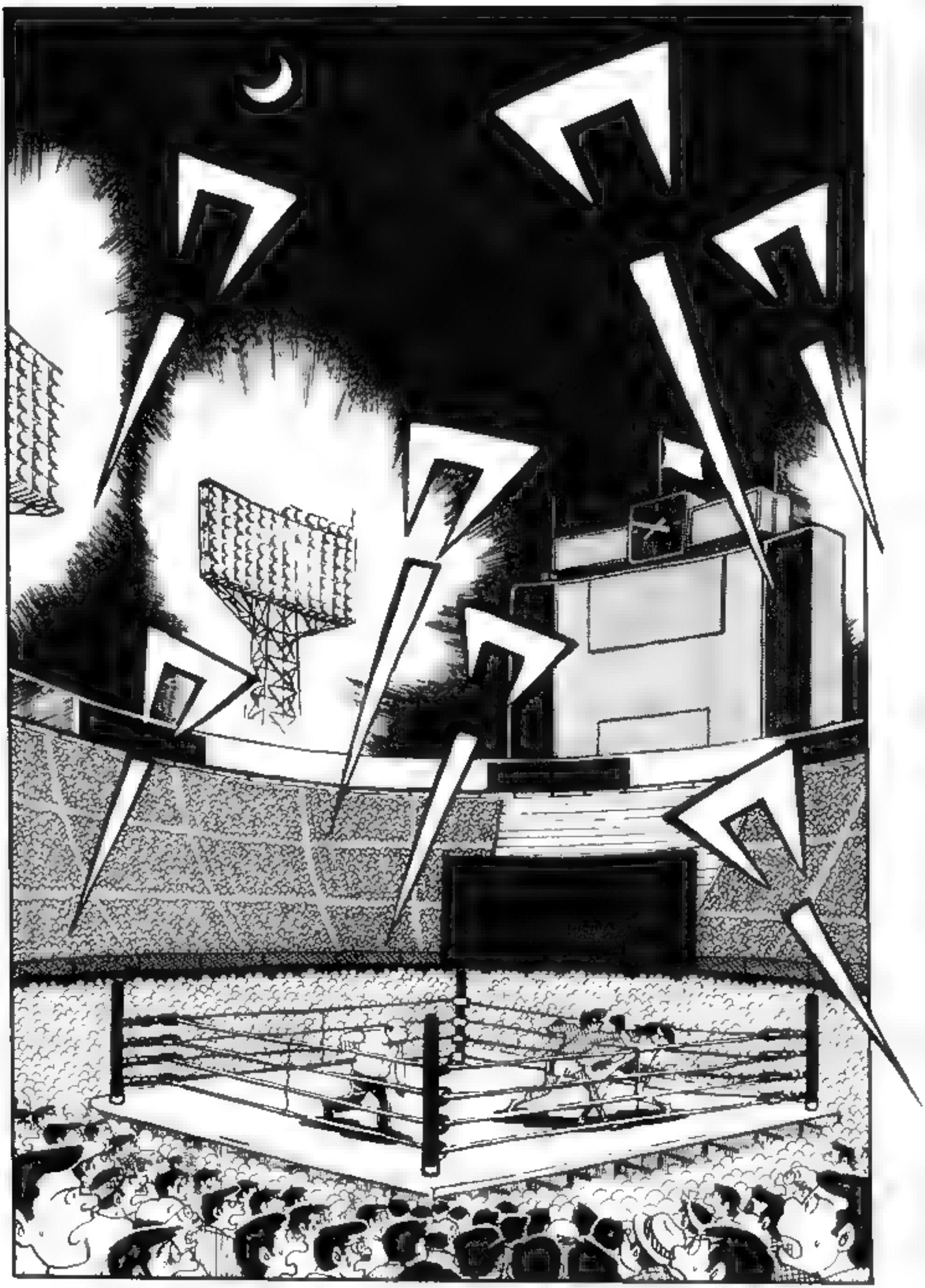
NGH-

HAHH!

UTTERLY...


EVERY LAST SPECK OF IT!





AHHH...

OH GOD... IT'S NO GOOD... THIS MATCH IS DONE...

PULL YOURSELF TOGETHER!

OH FOR GOD'S SAKE, YABUKI!

IF THIS IS HOW IT'S GONNA BE, WE SHOULD JUST THROW IN THE TOWEL...

N-NISHI...

MATCH OF THE CENTURY!? WHAT A FARCE!

COMING ALL THE WAY TO KOURAKUEN STADIUM FOR A MATCH AS ONE-SIDED AS THIS IS LIKE A DONBURI WITH NO TOPPINGS!

THE ONLY THING LIVING UP TO THE TITLE IS CARLOS! BUT I CAME TO SEE A FIGHT, NOT A SOLO!

OOOF... YABUKI'S BECOMING REDUCED TO A BLOODY PULP!

CARLOS IS CLEARLY SET ON FINISHING THE MATCH THIS ROUND!

THE CROWD'S GETTING ROWDY, GOING SO FAR AS TO CALL THIS FIGHT A SOLO PERFORMANCE...

AHHH! ANOTHER DIRECT HIT BY CARLOS! YABUKI STAGGERS BACKWARDS AGAIN!

E... EASILY RILED UP, AREN'CHA...?

HA...

UGHH!

W- WHOA...

BUT I'M GONNA HAVE TO ASK YOU TO PLAY WITH ME ALONG THE ROPES ONE MORE TIME...

GOOD WORK TONIGHT,

AHH...

HEH HEH.

HEH

THE ROPES ...?

WHAA!?

AHHH! IS YABUKI ATTEMPTING TO USE HIS ROPE-TACTICS AGAIN!?

J- JOE...

THERE WE GO.

HIS EXPRESSION SAYS IT ALL...

EVEN CARLOS IS STUNNED AS HE STANDS STILL DUMBFOUNDED.

BUT HERE HE IS, LEANING AGAINST THE ROPES TO THE SHOCK OF EVERYONE!

I DON'T KNOW IF YABUKI HAS BECOME OVERWHELMED BY THE SHOCK OF HAVING HIS ROPE-TACTICS NULLIFIED SO THOROUGHLY,

AN EXPRESSION OF SHOCK AND DISAPPOINTMENT AT THE FACT THAT HIS PROMISING FOE COULD ONLY AMOUNT TO THIS MUCH IN THE END...

HAHA...

HEH.

OR DID ALL THOSE PUNCHES TO YOUR HEAD WIPE OUT THE MEMORY OF WHAT HAPPENED WHEN YOU TRIED THAT JUST A LITTLE WHILE AGO!?

ARE YOU RETARDED!?

GET OFF THE RING, YOU MORON!

AREN'T YOU GONNA THROW IT!?

WHAT'RE YOU JUST HOLDING THAT TOWEL FOR!?

N-NO WAIT, NISHI...!

JOE... WHAT ON EARTH ARE YOU...

AH-

AHHH! THERE HE GOES WITH THAT LOW POSTURE AGAIN!

AFTER A DEEP SIGH, CARLOS IS-

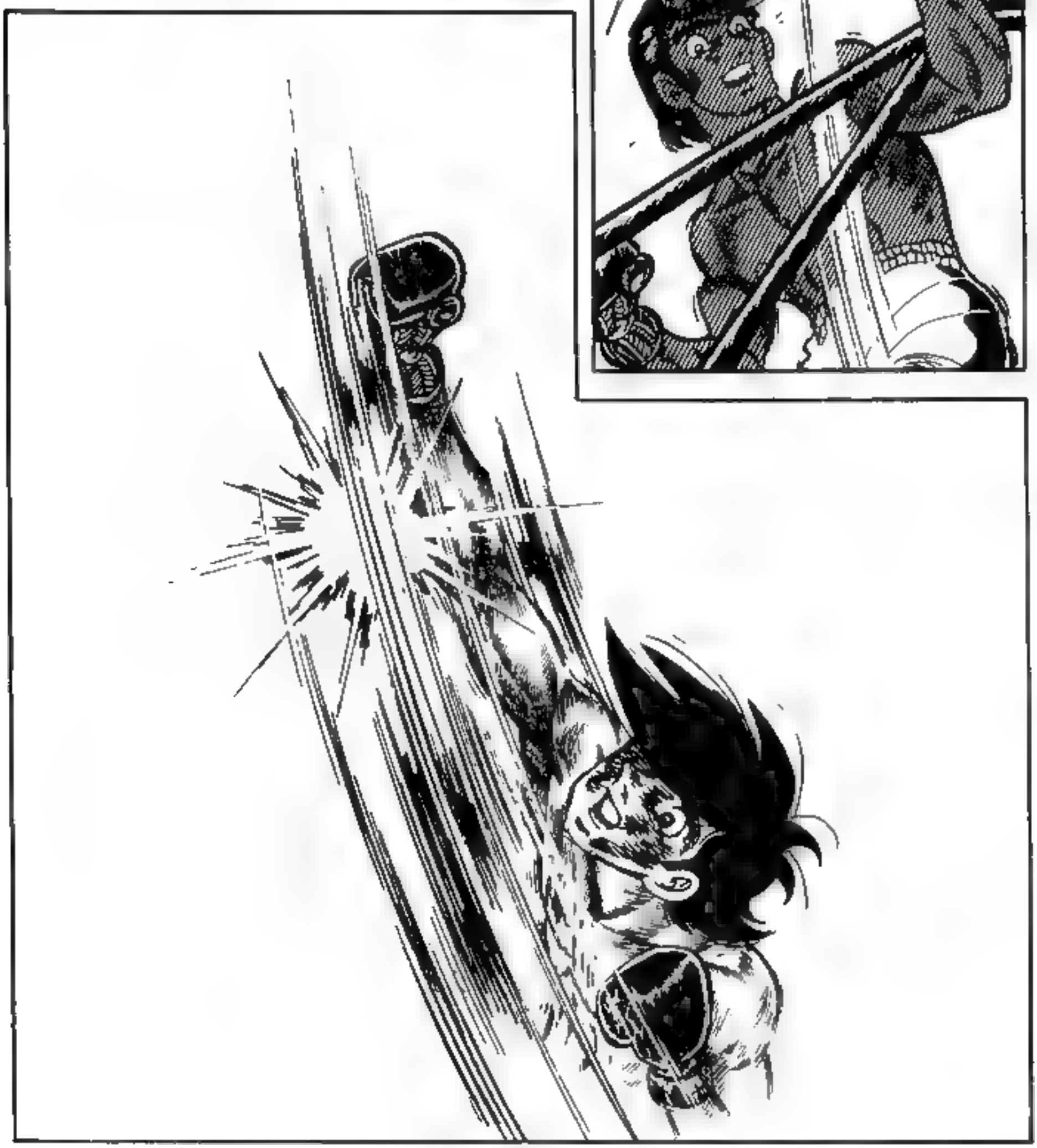
SIGH ...

HAVING SANDWICHED YABUKI WITH HIS BODY AND THE STIFF ROPES, CARLOS MOVES IN FOR THE KILL!

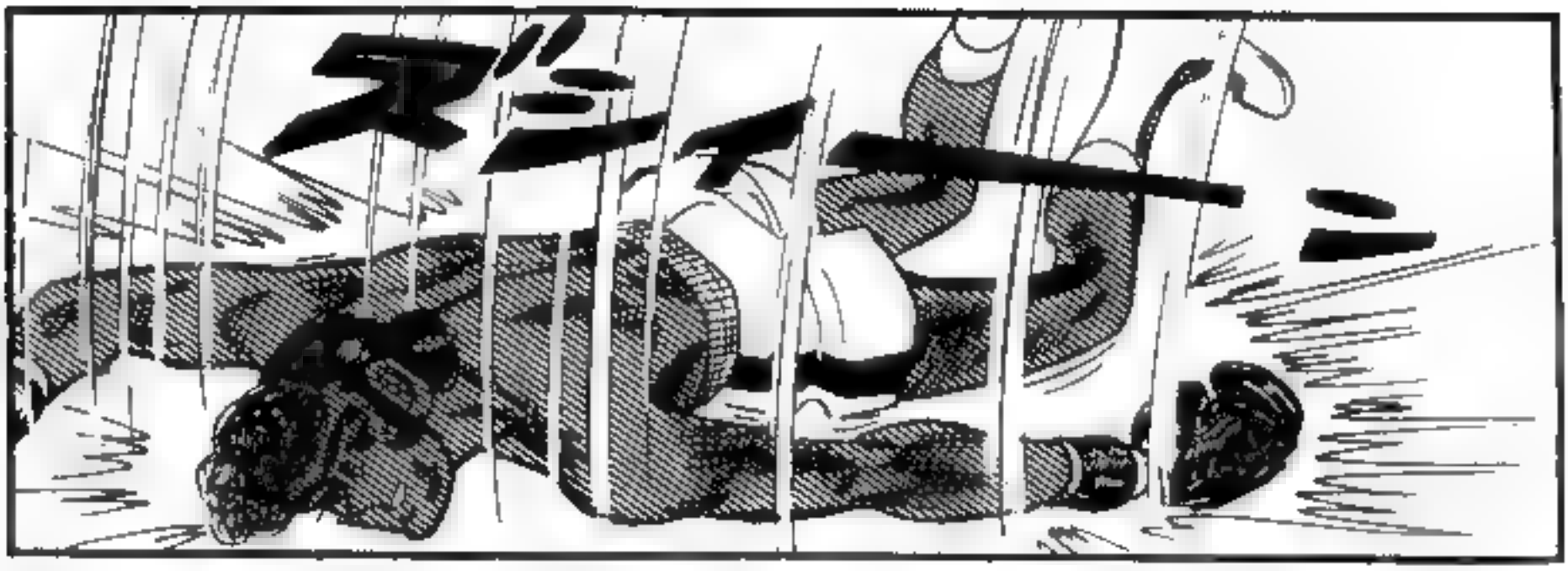
WITH CARLOS BARELY A FOOT AWAY FROM HIS FACE, YABUKI CAN'T ESCAPE FORWARDS OR BACKWARDS!
AHHH! THE ROPES THAT YABUKI'S LEANING BACK ON ARE CAUGHT BY CARLOS' ARM AGAIN!

W-
WHA!?

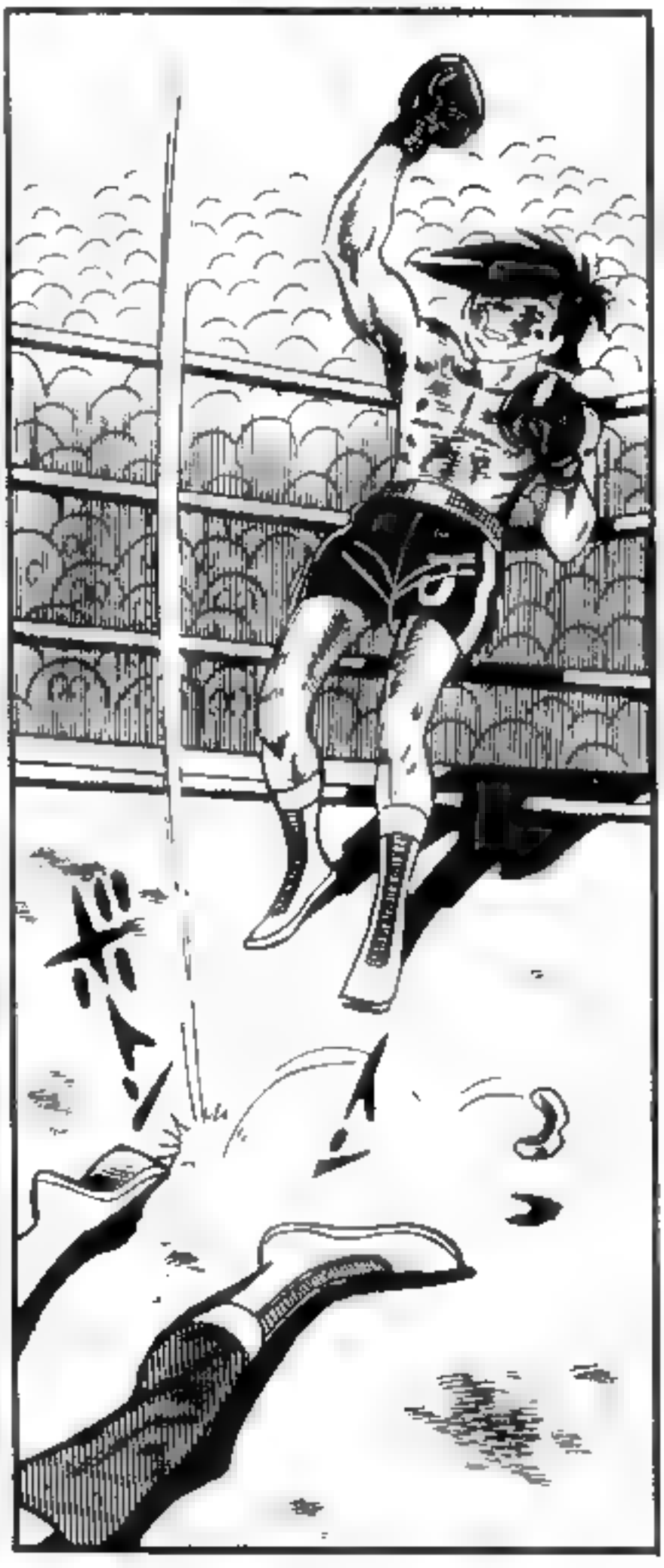
AHH-



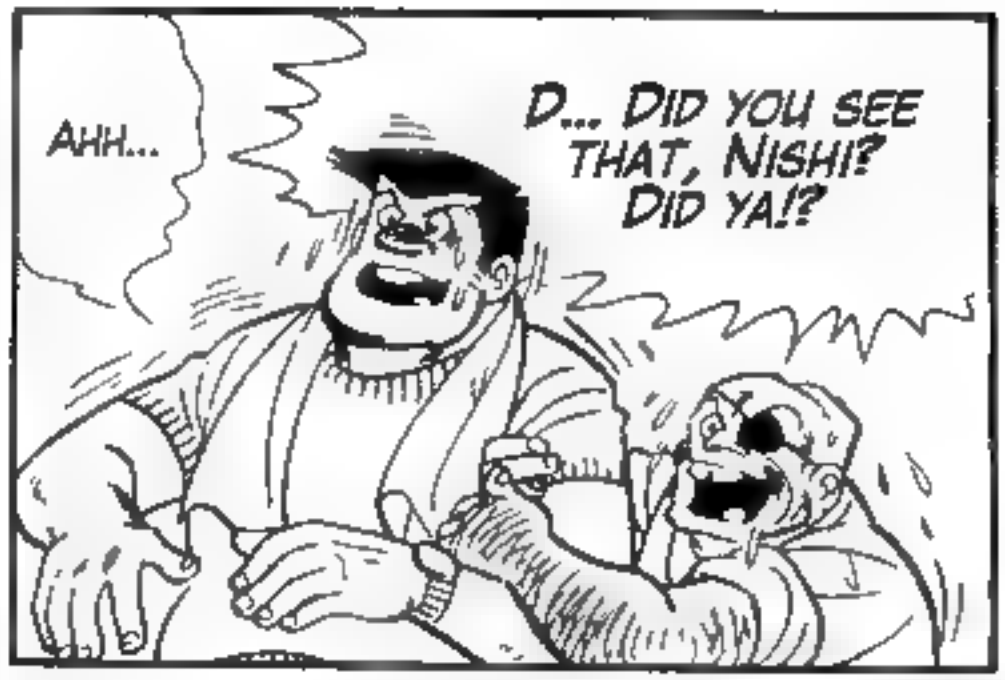
AGHHH...


R'S

G-
GAHH...
I REPEAT! CARLOS HAS GONE DOWN!
C...
C-CARLOS IS DOWN!



AHHH...
WHAAA...


AHH...
D... DID YOU SEE THAT, NISHI? DID YA!?

C-CARLOS...

T-THAT'S OUR JOE! HE'S PULLED A COMEBACK!
WOOHOO!

THIS FIGHT IS CLEARLY LIVING UP TO ITS REPUTATION AS THE MATCH OF THE CENTURY!

THIS MATCH IS NO LONGER A SOLO PERFORMANCE!

I CAN HARDLY MAKE HEADS OF TAILS OF WHAT HAPPENED BUT ONE THING IS CLEAR!

1!

2!

3!

IT SHOULDN'T BE POSSIBLE TO SWING A POWERFUL UPPERCUT FROM SUCH A RESTRICTED POSTURE...

AFTER ALL, HE WAS SANDWICHED BETWEEN THE STIFF ROPES AND CARLOS' BODY.

EVEN IF THE CHIN IS A CRITICAL POINT ON THE HUMAN BODY, I CAN HARDLY BELIEVE AN UPPERCUT HAVING THIS MUCH DAMAGE...

I DID MANAGE TO GLIMPSE AN UPPERCUT TO CARLOS' CHIN, BUT...

B... BUT HOW ON EARTH DID YABUKI MANAGE TO STAGE THIS MIRACULOUS COMEBACK?

ARRIBA, CARLOS!

C... CARLOS!

5!

4!

6!

7!

...

JOE...

PÁRATE POR FAVOR!

ARRIBA!

9!

8!

CARLOS STANDS UP IN THE NICK OF TIME AT THE COUNT OF 9!

H-HE STOOD UP!

YOU REALLY ARE ONE HELL OF A GUY...

JOE YABUKI...

YOU...

THANK GOD...

C... CARLOS...

FROM NOW ON... N-NO, THAT'S THE ONE AND ONLY TIME...

F-FIGHT ON!

THAT I'LL TRULY RESPECT YOUR SKILLS AS A BOXER, JOE YABUKI...

HE STILL HASN'T RECOVERED!

COME ON JOE!

NOW'S YOUR CHANCE TO ATTACK!

UGH!

YABUKI SEEMS UNSTOP-PABLE!
CARLOS RIVERA IS JUST STANDING OUT THERE LIKE A PUNCHING BAG TO THE NOW RENEWED YABUKI!

I'M SURE HE'S STILL FEELING THE EFFECTS OF THAT DOWN JUST NOW!
CARLOS LOOKS LIKE HE'S ON THE VERGE OF COLLAPSING BUT HE'S JUST BARELY HOLDING ON WITH SHEER SPIRIT!

RETURN BACK ALL THOSE HITS IN DOUB- NO, TRIPLE! NO, A HUNDRED TIMES BACK!
THAT'S IT, JOE!
Y-YES, GIVE HIM ANOTHER UPPERCUT!

AH! CARLOS IS CLINCHING!
UGH, DAMN IT...
AGH-
GET OFFA ME!

AGHH-

BREAK IT OFF!

BREAK!

CARLOS DESPERATELY TRIES TO STOP JOE'S RUSH BY CLINCHING!

HE CLINCHES AGAIN!

D-DAMN IT...

RESUME THE FIGHT!

DON'T GIVE HIM A SECOND TO CATCH HIS BREATH!

HE'S GONNA RECOVER ONCE THIS ROUND ENDS!

HE'S CLEARING HOLDING ONTO YABUKI'S ARM AS HE TRIES TO CATCH A BREAK!

CARLOS IS HOLDING THIS TIME!

A SHAMEFUL DISPLAY BY THE UNCROWNED EMPEROR, THE SO-CALLED VENEZUELAN TERROR!

AHH-

NGHH...

SON OF A...

BREAK IT OFF!

HUFF...

HUFF

HUFF

YABUKI TOOK ON YOUR PUNCHES FAIRLY SO THE LEAST YOU COULD DO IS RETURN THE SAME COURTESY!

YOU TRYIN' TO DANCE OR FIGHT OUT THERE!?

THAT'S FREAKIN' DIRTY, CARLOS!

DON'T REST NOW!

GET IN THERE, JOE!

YOU'VE GOTTA FINISH HIM OFF IN THIS ROUND!

WITH SUCH A TOUGH GUARD, IT'LL BE HARD TO INFLICT ANY SIGNIFICANT DAMAGE...

CARLOS STIFFENS HIS GUARD!

SON OF A! HE'S LIKE A DAMN TURTLE!

ドドドカカカ

BUT TO THINK THE PROUD AND FLASHY CARLOS RIVERA WOULD THROW ASIDE HIS EGO AND RESORT TO SUCH DESPERATE ATTEMPTS AT RECOVERY...

HE WAS SOOOOO CLOSE!

DAMN IT!

AND THERE GOES THE BELL FOR THE 4TH ROUND!

JUST LISTEN TO THE DEAFENING APPLAUSE FROM 37,000 EXCITED FANS!

ALTHOUGH YABUKI WASN'T ABLE TO FINISH CARLOS OFF, I'D SAY THAT ROUND WAS MOST LIKELY A 5-3 OR EVEN A 5-2 IN HIS FAVOUR!

CARLOS...

HANG IN THERE, CARLOS!

I TAKE BACK MY COMMENT ABOUT THIS BEING A SOLO!

I'M FALLIN' FOR YOU ALL OVER AGAIN!

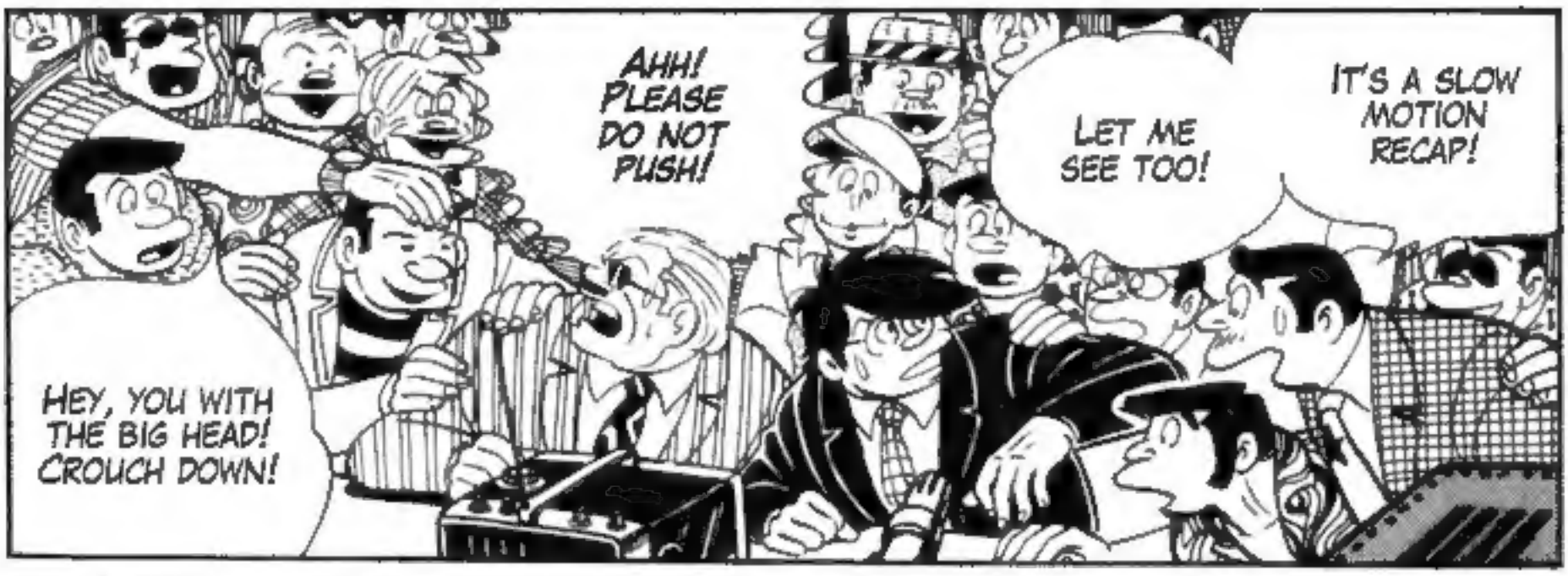
ATTA BOY, YABUKI!

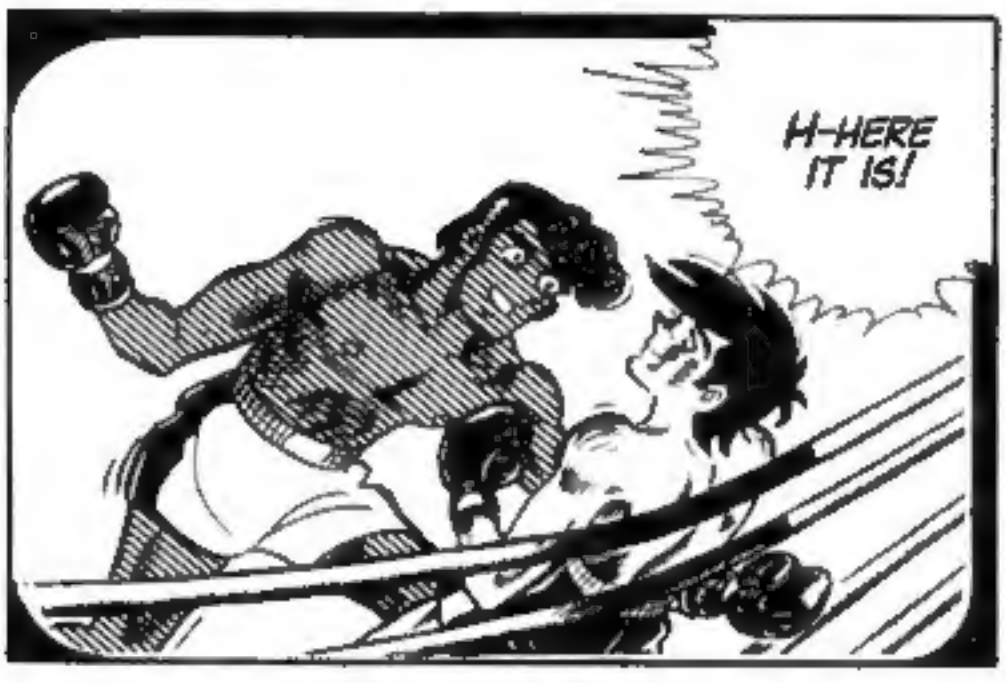
Y-YES, LET'S...

LET'S NOW TURN OUR ATTENTION TO THE SLO-MO REPLAY TO CAST THE LIGHT ON THE UNEXPECTED REVERSAL THAT ROUND.

WELL,

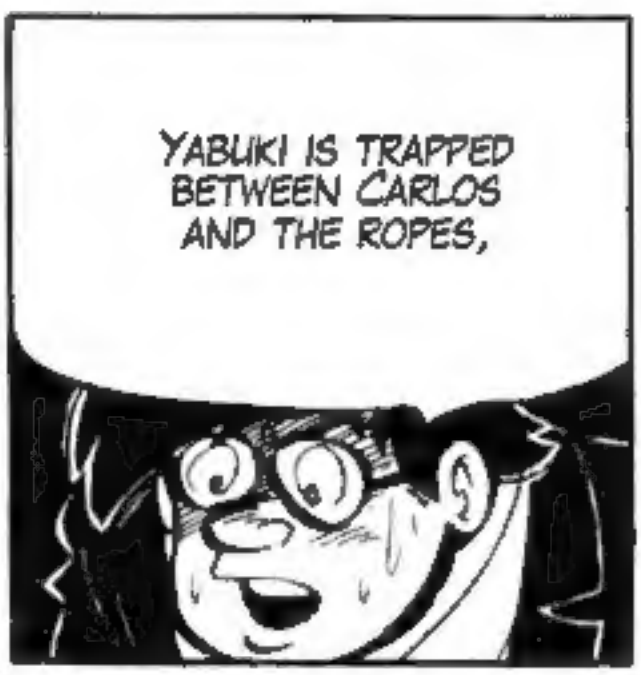
HEY, THEY'RE SHOWING THE REPLAY!


AHH! PLEASE DO NOT PUSH!
HEY, YOU WITH THE BIG HEAD! CROUCH DOWN!
LET ME SEE TOO!
IT'S A SLOW MOTION RECAP!


H-HERE IT IS!

HEY THAT HURTS!
STOP SHOVING!

AND HERE COMES CARLOS' RIGHT HOOK...


YABUKI IS TRAPPED BETWEEN CARLOS AND THE ROPES,

W-WOULD YOU LOOK AT THAT! YABUKI SINKS DOWN BEFORE CARLOS CAN LAND HIS PUNCH!

AH-

AHHH!

HE'S PUT HIS ENTIRE WEIGHT ON THE TWO LOWER ROPES!

AHHH!

AND HE CROUCHES ALL THE WAY D-

A- AND...

AHHH!

AND AS HE COMES BACK UP, SO DOES HIS RIGHT ARM FOR AN UPPERCUT!

USING THOSE ROPES HE SAT ON, HE SPRINGS BACK UP AT AN INCREDIBLE SPEED!

AGHHH...

OHHH!